

THE EXCEPTIONAL-TYPICAL HISTORY OF A MÉTIS ELDER IN
FORT ST. JOHN

by

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Abstract

This research is focussed on the collection and analysis of oral histories and diaries of Fort St. John Métis Elder May Barrette. By delving into May's life through oral histories, personal diaries, and other archival research, I am constructing a microhistorical biography of one exceptional-typical woman's life to contribute to a more comprehensive history of Métis women in north-eastern British Columbia and the Peace River country. This research looks at diaries and oral histories as historical sources, and explores the details of May's life and her stories about women in the community. May's own accounts of her childhood, coming to the Peace River as a pioneer, leaving to pursue an education, returning to start a family and taking on a self described role as a "diary keeper," exemplifies the significance of a microhistorical subject. The life of an exceptional-typical individual, like May, offers historians a window into the experiences of women in one of the last pioneer areas in Canada. Her voice, telling individual as well as community stories, is doubly-relational; May's life story touches not just on the broader issues affecting her and her family, but also those of women in the Peace and her community as a whole. Through sharing her diaries and stories May made sure that these stories would not just continue to be told and after she was gone, but that the stories of the women in Fort St. John were treated as a valuable part of the area's history.

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*This is dedicated to my grandmothers:
While looking for your names and following your traces you led me here.
& to my mother who is with you now.*

Chapter 1: Introduction, Objectives and Métis Studies

*I usually tell the young people not to be ashamed they're Métis because they come from
two top-classes of people.*

*Two-- the women helped the pioneers, you know, the voyageurs to survive.
If it wasn't for them they would not have survived.*

May Barrette

Introduction

In December 1992, just before New Year's, a reporter from the Alaska Highway News came to the house of May and Bob Barrette to interview the couple and write an article for their 50th wedding anniversary. Family and friends were excited to read about the lives of two Fort St. John pioneers, but were disappointed. The resulting article only told half of the couple's story. The article sadly is lost, but May remembers it well:

Bob was interviewed, I wasn't. So, I never said anything at the time but my girlfriends that knew me-- "Where are you, May? There's nothing in here about you." I said, "It's our age. Our modern age."¹

The modern age is changing. Indigenous and women's history has always been connected with stories and storytelling, and now their stories are moving into mainstream history; the theme of the 2010 Canadian Historical Association (CHA) Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences is *Telling Stories and Storytelling*. From the CHA website:

Storytelling is one of the oldest forms of communication. In telling stories about the past, historians, novelists, playwrights, teachers, museum curators, film makers, artists, illustrators, musicians, and public historians (to name just a few) engage in the task of making sense of "histories" that are often violent, always contradictory, and endlessly fascinating. These stories matter; for what is being

¹ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 24, 2009).

told, how it is being told, and what is being left unsaid shapes our sense of place, community, and nation, indeed our very sense of self.²

Still not everyone's stories are told or heard. The comment "there's nothing in here about you" is indicative of the continued absence of many women's voices in our community, regional, and national histories, these stories do matter. It has only been since the 1960s that women's voices have been featured in historical scholarship.³ It wasn't until the 1970s with Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halfbreed* and the 1980s in academia when *Strangers in Blood* and *Being and Becoming Métis* entered the academy that historic lives of Métis women became an active field of study. Another phenomenon that also emerged in the 1970s is a sub-discipline of history that is focussed on smaller, more marginalised histories called Microhistory. Microhistory concentrates on historical fragments and in particular on the *exceptional- typical* which "concentrates on the intensive study of particular lives' to reveal the 'fundamental experiences and *mentalités* of ordinary people.'"⁴ The example of one woman's personal story, like that told in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, rather than unique becomes, "in effect shared experiences."⁵ Telling the story of one life helps illuminate other women's lives. In order to shed light on the lives of the women who first settled in the Peace River, this research couples the approach of the *exceptional-typical* with the focus of Métis Studies. This thesis concentrates on the life of

² Canadian Historical Association, *Canadian Historical Association: 2010 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences - Montréal (Concordia University)*, May 21, 2010, <http://www.cha-shc.ca/en/> (accessed May 24, 2010).

³ Michael Roberts, "Women's History and Gender History," in *Making History: an Introduction to the History and Practices of a Discipline*, ed. Peter Lambert and Phillip Schofield, 192-203 (New York: Routledge, 2004), 192.

⁴ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001), 131.

⁵ Toni A. Culjack, "Searching for a Place in Between: The Autobiographies of Three Canadian Métis Women," *The American Review for Canadian Studies*, Spring/ Summer 2001: 139.

one individual in particular: Métis Elder, diarist, and storyteller - May Barrette (née Whitford).

Although the history of the Métis People on the Prairies, particularly southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan, is quite well-documented, the history of the British Columbian Métis People is only now beginning to be explored. The purpose of this work is to fill in the some of the gaps left in Métis history in British Columbia though a brief history of the early Métis families in the city of Fort St. John (one of the oldest established fur trade communities in the province) and a corollary airing of Métis women's voices in the history of Fort St. John. These are needed because Métis women lead unique lives and, as anthropologist Julie Cruikshank writes in her introduction to *Life Lived Like a Story*, "Native women's stories differ both from Native Men's accounts and those of Non-Native Women."⁶ Heather Devine notes that although there is some excellent third party scholarship written on the Métis, the perspectives of the Métis themselves are largely still absent. However, she also notes that we can and need to find Métis life histories in "biographical dictionaries, in old-timers' reminiscences that have been gathered and published, and in scholarly and popular biographies."⁷ This is an area, partly through a close association with the larger Métis community and particularly by work with Elders that some headway can be made.

⁶ Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 3.

⁷ Heather Devine, "Métis Lives, Past and Present A Review Essay," *BC Studies* 128 (Winter 2000/2001), 85.

Research Objectives

This research is focussed on the collection and analysis of oral histories and diaries of a pioneer Métis family in Fort St. John and the Northern Peace River in the present day provinces of British Columbia and Alberta. The research concentrates on the diaries written over the last sixty years by a Métis Elder named May Barrette. By looking at May's family through oral histories, personal diaries, and other archival research, I have assembled a microhistorical biography of one exceptional-typical woman's history, in order to contribute to a more comprehensive history of Métis presence in north-eastern British Columbia and the Peace River country.

The central question this research is interested in answering is: what do the diaries and oral histories of May Barrette illustrate about the lived experience of a Métis woman growing up and living in the frontier community of Fort St. John? The second chapter discusses the methodological, theoretical and ethical decisions about how the actual research was conducted. The following chapters detail the history of the Peace River area, and also look at the complexities of diaries in the abstract, and by comparing May's diaries to two others written in Fort St. John (by Frank Beatton and missionary Monica Storrs). Finally, May's self-narrated history is examined and three events that specifically deal with women in Fort St. John that appear in both May's oral and written histories are discussed.

The results of studying May Barrette's diaries and oral histories demonstrated how, as an aboriginal diarist and storyteller, May assumes a doubly relational voice. She narrates not just the details of her own biography, but also that of her family, her

neighbours and her wider community. In particular, she relates the experiences of ordinary women living in what is still a masculine space: that of the fur trade, the farm, the trap-line, the gas lines and the highway. May's stories about growing up in the what was known as the 'Last Great West' - her life on the farm, the uncomfortable relationship with her father, and her eventual choice to pursue education at considerable cost - are a lens into the rarely viewed life of women. Her stories include the women that she lived amongst, and touch on the daily struggles of her mother, the companionship and support of the Women's Institute (WI) and the brutal abuse inflicted on her friend Shirley. Her history, although specifically drawn from events in her life, talks to the day to day lives of all the women in the Peace – aboriginal or white - and how complex women's interactions with family were, how vulnerable illiteracy could leave women, how education could prove a lifelong strength, and how the women of the Peace organised to support each other in times of birth, violence and death. May does not tell just her own story, she extends her voice to that of her family and to the entire community of women that she belonged. This is how the *exceptional-typical* historical subject provides a new historical perspective, by providing an insight into the experiences and *mentalités* of the women in the Peace. By sharing her diaries and stories May made sure that these stories would not just continue to be told and after she was gone, but that the stories of the women in Fort St. John were treated as a valuable part of the area's history.

Life stories are a significant source for the historian. The value in May Barrette's narrative voice, both as a pioneer woman growing up in a frontier society, and as a resident of a remote Métis community outside of the conventionally accepted Métis national homeland, accounts for her exceptional position even within greater Métis

scholarship. May, as a leader in her community and as a self-described “diary keeper” and storyteller, is an ideal research partner. She represents, as a chronicler of events and also as a woman who lived a typical life of a mother and wife, an excellent example of an exceptional-typical microhistorical subject within a Canadian context. Since the research is drawn from her diaries and oral histories, the focus will be on the collection and analysis of these stories. According to linguist Charlotte Linde, life stories narrate more than just the events of a life: “Life stories express our sense of self: who we are and how we got that way. They are also one very important means by which we communicate this sense of self and negotiate it with others.”⁸ Microhistory focuses on understanding context, lived experience, and biographical histories of people whose lives are complex and unique and as such, fits nicely with the study of May Barrette’s oral histories and diaries in Fort St. John.⁹ In some ways, a move towards microhistory now is part of the development of Métis historiography as well.

Métis Studies

Métis Studies developed through a scholarly reimagining of the people who wrote about, worked in, interacted with, married into, and emerged from the fur trade.¹⁰ Life

⁸ Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: the Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

⁹ István Szijártó, "Four Arguments for Microhistory," *Rethinking History* 6, no. 2 (2002), 209-215.

¹⁰ Several influential works of Métis History include: national history in George Stanley’s *The Birth Of Western Canada: A History of The Riel Rebellions* (1936), political history in Chris Anderson’s “Residual Tensions of Empire” (2005) and John Weinstien’s *The Quiet Revolution West* (2007), legal history in Lawrence Barkwell’s, “Early Law and Social Control among the Métis” (1991), language in John Crawford’s “Speaking Michif in Four Métis communities” (1983), religious, psychoanalytic history in Thomas Flanagan’s *Louis David Riel* (1979), ethnography in Elmer Ghostkeeper’s *Spirit Gifting*:

writing has also been a staple of Métis history. Biographical texts on the more colourful Métis leaders have been something of a cottage industry, particularly the life of Métis leader Louis Riel.¹¹ Even outside of a singular focus on one individual, autobiographic writing is the source of much of fur trade studies. Biography, journal and letter writing were foundational in the creation of a coherent, albeit dispersed, community. The remoteness of the traders' locations forced communication through letters and post journals, indeed, "if they had resided in a single community in its usual concrete sense, communications to and about their kin, friends and colleagues would have been largely oral and lost."¹² Many journals written by fur traders, explorers and travellers have survived, giving us their outsider's view of the land and the people who lived in it. Figures such as David Thompson, William Butler, George Simpson, Daniel Harmon, and the journals and paintings of Paul Kane, helped to build a rich, albeit Eurocentric, view of not only Western North America, but also the Métis communities that formed within this geographic region.

However, biographies of some singular exceptional-typical individuals who would not have been direct contributors to journals, partially due to their lack of audience or education, have been written. John C. Jackson's *Jemmy Jock Bird: Marginal man on the Blackfoot frontier* (2003) tells the story of an iconoclastic individual. Bird was a Métis son of a Hudson's Bay Company Chief Trader who was instrumental in guiding several important expeditions, including the first Sinclair expedition, through the Rocky

The Concept of Spiritual Exchange (1996) and ethnohistory in Nicole St.-Onge's *Saint-Laurent Manitoba: Evolving Métis Identities: 1850-1914* (2004).

¹¹ Donald Swainson, "Reiliana and the Structure of Canadian History," *Journal of Popular Culture* 14, no. 2 (1980), 288.

¹² Jennifer Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Company Families in Indian Country* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1980), xii.

Mountains.¹³ He denied the conventions of his age, and Jackson's biography of Bird provides a rich addition to previous histories. Women's involvement in the history of the fur trade was similarly glossed over. It has only been in the last 30 years that women and their roles have been acknowledged in the larger discussions detailing both the fur trade and Western Canadian history. Historian Sylvia Van Kirk mentions in the beginning of her book *Many Tender Ties*, "I have often been met with the bemused query, 'what women were there in the fur trade?'"¹⁴ The answer was many. Indeed, counting the contributions of the women and families in small seemingly marginalised communities has reinvigorated Métis historiography

Up until the 1980s, Métis history was seen primarily as a small element of the history of the fur trade, which traditionally was more interested in examining the lives of the European men involved, rather than the communities, families and wives of the traders. Jean Barman notes that the focus was solely on the European backgrounds and experiences of the traders. The women were seen as 'invisible' since "non-white women were considered only in passing and then as exceptions to the norm."¹⁵ She goes on to state that the presence of non-white or Aboriginal women in fur trade histories was only accomplished by either obscuring the woman's aboriginal ancestry or by treating the women as an ethnographic specimen "ensconced in some verbal museum of the past."¹⁶

¹³ John C. Jackson, *Jemmy Jock Bird: Marginal Man on The Blackfoot frontier* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), 3.

¹⁵ Jean Barman, "Invisible Woman: Aboriginal Mothers and Mixed Race Daughters in Rural Pioneer British Columbia," in *Beyond the City Limits Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. R.W. Sandwell, 168-188 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998), 168.

¹⁶ Barman, 168.

Several seminal works in the 1980s changed this, particularly with the work of three prairie historians: Jennifer Brown, Jacqueline Peterson, and Sylvia Van Kirk. Peterson's work *Strangers in Blood* (1980) and Brown and Peterson's collection *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* (1985) changed the focus from the travels of the European fur traders to the women that the traders lived with and mixed race communities that they were a part of. These works moved Canadian historical scholarship away from a fixation on a grand narrative of the history of the colonization of Canada towards a closer, more intimate history of the mixed-race communities and families within the new nation.

Brown's *Strangers in Blood* attempted, through a close examination of fur trade journals, personal correspondence and wills, to illuminate the relationships which were previously dismissed as transitory "country marriages"¹⁷ between the fur trading men and their Aboriginal and Métis wives.¹⁸ Brown, through the examination of wills in particular, illuminates the processes the men attempted to take to secure their families' legal and social status. In one instance Brown quotes a correspondence in which the country wife of trader Joseph McGillivray, named Frances Bouche, was advised to identify herself as a "widow" in order to legitimize her family's claim as the beneficiaries of McGillivray's will.¹⁹ This type of close examination moved the academic focus from the men working in the trade and shifted it to the families they created. This shift has legitimized the families as an equally important historical subject.

¹⁷ Country marriages, or marriages *à la façon du pays* (in the custom of the country), were the unions, both short and long term, that developed out of an indigenous marriage tradition and were adapted to meet the needs of fur trade society.

¹⁸ Van Kirk, 28.

¹⁹ Brown, 144.

The seminal *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (1983) by Sylvia Van Kirk, followed up on Brown's work by focusing solely on the roles played by First Nations, then Métis and later European women, in the development of fur trade society. Van Kirk traces the observation, made by James Douglas in 1840, that "Indian wives were once the vogue, the half-breed supplanted these, and now we have the lovely tender exotic torn from its parents bed to pine and languish in the desert."²⁰ Van Kirk's work not only follows the evolution of these marriages, but the causes for the evolution. She extends her discussion to focus on the larger roles of Aboriginal people, particularly of the women, as "active agents" in their fur trade societies in spite of the restrictions of their roles of wife, daughter, mother or worker.²¹

Brown and Peterson's collection *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America* shifted gears, but brought a similar focus to the level of communities and networks of families, Peterson's chapter "Many Roads to Red River: Métis genesis in the Great Lakes region, 1680-1815" looks at communities that developed both in and around Michilimackinac. Verne Dusenberry's chapter "Waiting for a day that never comes: The dispossessed métis of Montana" looks at the Métis communities that existed outside of the imposed Canadian/US border and how they languished under a repressive American colonial policy.²² *The New Peoples* was significant, not just as an intellectual manifestation of the new importance of the Métis, (not coincidentally through their inclusion in the Canadian constitution) but also as redrawing "the boundaries of Canadian

²⁰ Van Kirk, 1.

²¹ Van Kirk, 7.

²² Verne Dusenberry, "Waiting for a Day that Never Comes: the dispossessed métis of Montana" in *The New Peoples: Being and Becoming Métis in North America*, ed. Jacqueline Peterson and Jennifer Brown, 119-136 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1985).

métissage by highlighting the connections between Métis of the Great Lakes and of the West and introducing the possibility of uniquely localized manifestations of Métis.”²³ Nicole St. Onge warns that even now there is a continuing need to reinterpret what has become “red river myopia” and that researchers need to be sensitive to the diverse experiences of all mixed ancestry people in North America.²⁴ Up until the works of Van Kirk, Brown and Peterson the voices of women and families in the fur trade and Métis outside the geography of the prairies were passed over and therefore unheard. Up until very recently relatively little has focussed on BC.

The history of the Northern British Columbian Métis is only now beginning to be documented. A lack of government recognition, demonstrated by the fact that Half-Breed Scrip was never offered in British Columbia, as well as the relative isolation of the Peace River from the rest of the province, left the northeast communities to slip through the historical cracks. The communities in the northeast developed differently than communities in central and Western British Columbia. Fur trade Posts such as Fort St. John and Hudson’s Hope developed as part of the Peace River district, as opposed to Kamloops or Fort St. James which were connected to the Columbia River fur trade. Fort St. John was administered from Edmonton and Winnipeg, not from Fort Vancouver, Fort Langley or later Victoria. Several books do cover the Northern Peace River fur trade, but only few deal explicitly with the Métis who settled there. The book *Prophecy of the Swan: Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823* (1995) provides an overview of the historic Peace River fur trade, but deals very little with the presence of the Métis in the

²³ Jean Barman and Mike Evans, "Reflections on Being, and Becoming, Métis in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, no. 161 (Spring 2009), 59.

²⁴ Nicole St-Onge, *Saint-Laurent Manitoba: Evolving Métis Identities, 1850-1914* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004) 2.

Peace River. The book mentions the early presence of Métis in the area, noting “[s]uch names as Bouche, Brunoche, Dejardin, Lafreniere, Perriard, Connoye, D'Allair, Gagnon, and Cardinal indicate the dominance of French Canadian and/or Métis employees in the North West Company.”²⁵ However, it does not discuss the men’s roles as early settlers in British Columbia. Jean Barman and Mike Evans have looked at the issue of Métis ethnogenesis in BC by comparing fur trade families that settled south of the Peace River in New Caledonia, what is now central British Columbia.²⁶ The chapter “Métis Networks in British Columbia: Examples from the Central Interior” by Evans, Barman, Legault, Dolmage and Appleby, further develop this analysis by examining the marriage patterns of the children of Fort St. James fur traders Jean Baptiste Boucher, and Peter Skeene Ogden. Evans et al. conclude that the families in British Columbia, particularly the Ogden’s, “created for themselves a spatially contained collective identity that was, in its essence, neither white nor First Nations.”²⁷ This identity lasted as a new, post-fur trade node, well into the twentieth century.²⁸ Two books that deal with the stories and histories of the Métis as settlers in the North-eastern area of British Columbia were two Participatory Action Research projects generated by the Prince George Métis Elders Society. These resulted in the books: *What it is to be Métis* (1999) and *A Brief History of the Short Life of the Island Cache* (2004). Both books attempt to tell the histories of the

²⁵ David V. Burley, J. Scott Hamilton and Knut R. Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 60.

²⁶ Barman and Evans, 59-91.

²⁷ Mike Evans, Jean Barman, Gabrielle Legault, Erin Dolmage and Geoff Appleby, "Métis Networks in British Columbia: Examples from the Central Interior," in *Contours of Metis Landscapes: Family, Mobility and History in Northwestern North America*, ed. Nicole St-Onge, Carolyn Podruchny and Brenda Macdougall, 383-423 (New York: State University of New York Press, Forthcoming), 400.

²⁸ Evans, Barman et al. “Métis Networks,” 403.

communities explicitly in the community's own words.²⁹ In *What it is to be Métis*, the Elders offer, through personal interviews, their individual life histories. *The Short life of the Island Cache* explores the history of a place called Foleys Cache, which was a short-lived Indian/Métis ghetto that was forced out of existence by the city of Prince George and was subsequently turned into an industrial area. *A Brief History of the Short Life of the Island Cache*, as a historical work looking at a community that was marginalized, only in existence for a few decades, and is almost entirely forgotten, is an excellent example of the exceptional typical microhistorical subject, both due to its subject matter and narrow focus.³⁰ The creation of a Métis historiography proceeds apace, but one area that is only now getting much attention is the intersection of individual and group identity. In part this is due to the shifting and multiple categories of identity that necessarily arise in the complex intercultural contact.

Identity, to borrow Linda Colley's metaphor, is not a hat; people can and do wear many identities at once.³¹ A people like the Métis whose multiracial background, social and legal status has changed so dramatically in the last 200 years have many hats to choose from. May Barrette wears many hats. When I first started this project I thought that identity would play a more substantial role, but May wasn't particularly interested or engaged in talking about her identity, and when she did her self-identity was, at best,

²⁹ Mike Evans et al, *What it is to Be Métis* (Prince George: UNBC Press, 1999), 245., Mike Evans, Lisa Krebs and et al, *A Brief History of the Short Life of the Island Cache*, Vol. Solstice Series , #2 vols. (Edmonton: Canadian Circumpolar Institute Press, 2004).

³⁰ Mike Evans, "Ethics, Anonymity and Authorship in Community-Centred Research Or Anonymity and the Island Cache," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 2, no. 1 (2004), 61.

³¹ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 6.

slippery. When asked what it meant to be a Métis May expressed a sense of historic pride in her ancestors:

I usually tell the young people not to be ashamed they're Métis because they come from two top-classes of people. Two-- the women helped the pioneers, you know, the voyageurs to survive. If it wasn't for them they would not have survived. And we went to Batoche where this man-- they came from Winnipeg by boat. Anyway he said, "If it wasn't for the women, and we got a sample of that on this trip," he said, "we would have given up a long time ago." But, he said, "They hung in there," so anyway it proves that it's cooperation that helped establish our country, you know, because the women were there to help the men.³²

This pride is evident in the statement "I usually tell the young people not to be ashamed they're Métis." May takes her role as an educator of young people seriously, and repeated the sentiment in a later interview almost verbatim "you see, the Métis are these pioneer voyageurs that came to America and if it wasn't for the women they tangled with they wouldn't have survived... So it comes from two very strong nations, you know."³³ In both quotes May identifies herself with her ancestors, with a great deal of pride.

Métis History and Métis Self-Identity

May's own self-identification as Métis would shift during the conversation. May identifies as aboriginal when she told me a story of how her father warned her about being careful around the men of the community: "Yeah. And he said, 'Because the white man has no respect for aboriginal girls or Métis girls. There's no respect there, only abuse.' So he said, 'You've got to defend yourself.' So it worked."³⁴ May's father is clearly telling May it is her aboriginality that puts her at risk, and she needs to protect

³² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

³³ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (August 4, 2009).

³⁴ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 23, 2009).

herself. In a later interview when I asked her about how she self-identified when she was younger, May switches, identifying herself as a Canadian, saying that she didn't know her history:

Me: So when-- you sort of mentioned that people didn't know about Métis. Did you know that you were Métis? Was that something--

May: Well, when you're a kid you accept life as it comes. You don't question anything... And then when I went on my own, after I left home, people used to ask me what nationality I was. And I didn't know... So-- because you don't know. I mean, if you don't know your own history, um-hum.

Me: Right. So what did you think your nationality was? Did you think you were British or--

May: No. No, Canadian, to the best-- Yeah, just a Canadian, thorough Canadian, yeah, um-hum. And I still feel that way.³⁵

Canadian is ambiguous enough that it could mean any number of things, including an identity that includes aboriginality.

How May and her family is perceived by outsiders also shifts depending on who is doing the identifying. May mentions her sister being identified as white by a group of First Nations boys in Cold Lake, where May's mother's family lived. The story was in the context of how she and her sister spoke Cree and she explains how her sister embarrassed a group of boys who didn't think she could understand them.

Yeah. And then my sister was at a rodeo out at Cold Lake, in that area, and she said all these boys were perched on this fence. And one of them said to the other boys, they were laughing and talking in Cree, and one of them said to the other boys, "These white women, they just walk around so smart as if their shit don't stink," he said, you know. And Velda turned around, I guess, and she said, "And these monkeys that are on these fences," [laughs] and, you know, she spoke in Cree. Well, she said, "You should have seen them scatter."³⁶

The boys in the story identify Velda as white, but she turns the tables on them by understanding Cree, May and Velda's first language. Velda demonstrates that she is also

³⁵ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

³⁶ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

aboriginal through her use of humour and language, but different from the “monkeys on the fence.” Although the Cree boys see May’s sister as white, Marianne Birley a white neighbour, identifies May’s family as Indian. Marianne was the British war bride of Doug Birley, who was, as the grandson of HBC trader Frank Beaton and his Métis wife Emma Shaw, also of mixed race. Marianne talked quite disparagingly of May and her family moving into her neighbourhood.

I knew his parents, Doug’s parents. She married Doug Birley, Marianne-- I can’t remember her last name now.... But anyway, at church one day I was talking to his [Doug’s] aunt. And she said to me, “May, where do you live?” she said. I said, “We bought some property that the Birleys forgot to release.” I said, “We bought it and we live just south of Birleys’.” “Oh, no,” she said. She looked disappointed. And you know, she said, “My daughter-in-law told me some Indians bought this property and you know what Indians are like, the machinery will be breaking down all over the place, they’ll be borrowing things, not returning them. And there’ll be this and that.”³⁷

Marianne parrots typically racist comments about May and her family, painting them as unreliable and undesirable as neighbours. Although May is certainly aboriginal, her husband Bob, a French Canadian from Ottawa, was not. When I asked May why her neighbour would have thought those kinds of negative things about her May attributed it to Marianne being English, and not understanding the history of the people in the area. Indeed, though May’s diaries and oral histories – her microhistory, we can all benefit from new understandings of what it was to be Métis³⁸, and a woman in the Peace of the last century.

³⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

³⁸ See Appendix I, Métis and Identity.

Chapter 2: Historiography, Ethical Considerations and Research Methods

Bob was interviewed, I wasn't. So, I never said anything at the time but my girlfriends that knew me-- "Where are you, May? There's nothing in here about you." I said, "It's our age. Our modern age."

May Barrette

The work with May Barrette is intended to fill a void that currently exists in Métis scholarship by approaching May's life stories as an exceptional-typical microhistory of a Métis Elder in Fort St. John. Up until now most scholarship on the Peace River has concentrated on the Peace's history as a resource for the metropole, starting as a fur trade centre, then an agricultural region and later as an oil and gas hub. With May, I have a unique opportunity to discuss the lived experience of a woman who grew up in the pioneer era of Fort St. John. In this chapter I will cover the methodological aspects to this research, looking at the use of narrative, historical methods, the ethical considerations of working with a life history and a description of my fieldwork with May.

Aboriginal scholars understandably question the approach historians have taken regarding Aboriginal history. In the introduction to "Deconstructing Métis Historiography" Leah Dorion and Darren Prefontaine identify the absence of Métis voices in Métis scholarship:

the recorded history of the Métis has been incomplete and contains many pejorative biases... this situation has begun to change as Métis people have moved into the role of historical narrators with their own views of their ancestors as historical participants"¹

¹ Leah Dorion and Darren Prefontaine, "Deconstructing Métis Historiography: Giving Voice to the Metis People", in *Métis Legacy*, ed. Lawrence Barkwell, Leah Dorion and Darren Prefontaine, 13-37 (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2001), 13.

Indigenous activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith asks the question “Is History Important to Indigenous Peoples?” Her answer is, of course yes, as the way history is formulated provides indigenous peoples with a chance to continue with the process of decolonization. Smith lists several criticisms of contemporary history. She problematizes history as a totalizing discourse, with embedded assumption that include that history is universal, has one stable chronology, is about development, and is a single coherent (and largely patriarchal) narrative. By looking at the creation of an Indigenous history, one that contests a Euro-centric view, it is essential to integrate the notion that “contested stories and multiple discourses about the past, by different communities, [are] closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary indigenous life.”² Smith notes that contested accounts are present in stories, genealogies, in place, within art and craft and the names that people carry. These become a system of knowledge, some of which will be “reclassified as oral *traditions* rather than histories.”³

Oral History and Narrative

In the prologue of Lee Maracle’s biography *Bobby Lee* she notes, “There are two voices in this book - mine and [editor] Don Barnett’s. As told-tos between whites and Natives rarely work, when they do, it’s wonderful, when they don’t it’s a disaster for the Native.”⁴ Two examples of Aboriginal narratives that work are found in the books *What it is to be a Métis*, and *Life Lived like a Story*. In *What it is to be a Métis*, a collection of

² Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books), 33.

³ Tuhiwai Smith, 33.

⁴ Lee Maracle, *Bobby Lee: Indian Rebel*, 2nd Edition (Toronto: Women's Press, 1990), 19.

first person Métis narratives, it is explicitly stated that the stories are told, as is, without any outside interpretation. They write that the best way to ensure that community members are represented fairly is for the researchers to stay silent, and to let people speak for themselves.⁵ This methodology is used to great effect in Julie Cruikshank's influential *Life Lived like a Story*. In her book, Cruikshank explores the life stories of three northern Canadian Aboriginal women. She approaches telling their stories by introducing each subject with an essay that provides a scholarly historic background to the women, Cruikshank's personal relationship with the woman, and their place in the larger community. The following sections of the book are made up of traditional stories that alternate with edited personal narratives. Cruikshank uses this structure to accomplish two things; firstly to demonstrate how each woman uses stories to explain events in her life, and secondly, to show how each woman brings special narrative skills to the construction of her own account.⁶ She includes the background material in each woman's chapter in order to provide a framework, so the narrator can convey the richness and subtlety of experience and explain how "normative rules actually worked in her life."⁷ Cruikshank believes that "the extent to which oral tradition can enlarge our understanding of the past, particularly in areas where written documents are biased by the circumstances or conditions under which they were produced."⁸

In my work with May Barrette's diaries and oral histories I have drawn from the methods and Indigenous methodologies set out by Evans and Cruickshank and, as Evans

⁵ Mike Evans and et al, *What it is to Be a Métis* (Prince George: UNBC Press, 1999). 259.

⁶ Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 17.

⁷ Cruikshank, 4.

⁸ Cruikshank, 3.

suggests, to let the people, or in this case May, speak for themselves, thereby creating a space in Métis Studies for Métis voices.⁹ To accomplish this, the structure of the thesis focuses on extracts drawn from interviews with May Barrette and her diaries. In addition, I have included an accompanying historical perspective in the vein of Cruickshank's work, focusing particularly on the development of the Peace River. I hoped to accomplish what Heather Devine sees as an essential balance in working with oral histories, that the academic commentary does not overshadow the importance of an intact, oral testimony.¹⁰ Instead, by developing a context within which to place May's narratives, I intend to provide an academic foundation that supports the diaries and the oral histories, so that their content cannot be dismissed as biased or overly subjective. Balancing the oral and the written, in the case of May's life stories, is essential. The richness of the storytelling combined with the huge amount of information in the diaries allows for a depth of narrative that could not be achieved by only using a single source. Additionally, the diaries begin in 1949, when May is already 28 years old so the stories can fill that earlier history.

Contemporary historic works see that lives are lived at the "intersection of individual and social dynamics" and can only be contextualized through that individual's place within their time.¹¹ The approach is no longer the storied lives of great men, rather it is led by a desire to examine individuals from a bottom up perspective, to introduce and focus on marginalized voices, and provide counter narratives to earlier assumptions

⁹ Evans et al, 259.

¹⁰ Heather Devine, "Métis Lives, Past and Present A Review Essay," *BC Studies* 128 (Winter 2000/2001), 88.

¹¹ Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithica, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008), 43.

which question the epistemological traditions of positivist research.¹² Much of the earlier history of Fort St. John were written by men, the history of the Peace River was documented by scholars that were interested in the economics of the Fur Trade and the “discoveries” of white traders like Alexander Mackenzie. The collection *Peace River Chronicles* includes eighty-one first-person accounts of life in the Peace River, of these, only ten are written by women, and none are written by aboriginal writers.

This sort of absence has moved narrative to the forefront of Aboriginal scholarship, particularly when dealing with the ideas of representation, authorship, and voice in works that study Aboriginal peoples. Heather Devine notes, “[a]t its best, autobiographical writing provides an insider’s perspective on identity that is intrinsically superior to the analyses of even the most sensitive observer.” She adds that the best and most useful biographies and autobiographies are those that “offer a window into an area of ethnicity that is imperfectly understood – this being the existential, psychological dimensions of living as a person of a particular ethnic identity.”¹³ She does caution that autobiographies can be misleading as they do inherently carry bias, hidden agendas and self-censorship in order to develop a particular narrative.¹⁴ Biography and autobiography however should not be dismissed; rather they should be approached as individual worldviews that are not to the work’s detriment, but in its favour, adding an additional piece of the fractured historical puzzle. Okanagan Elder and educator Jeanette Armstrong touches on this in her essay “We are the Story, Life Writing as Cultural Medium” in *Tainting History: Essays in Life Writing*. She reminds us “[w]hat is written has been

¹² Maynes, Pierce and Laslett, 2.

¹³ Devine, 86.

¹⁴ Devine, 86-87.

written because, through a process of cultural choice, it has [been] declared to be relevant. Already, in the choice of what is and what is not written about, writing reflects Cultural Experience.”¹⁵ Treating biographical texts as texts or discourse allows us to not just hold a life story as an object that is only valid in comparison with other more truthful sources, but rather to explore it as an alternate version of events. Telling a story, even in the most factual of manners, according to linguist Charlotte Linde, is a result of social productions, negotiations and rules of thumb which guide even the most simple of narrations.

In the social sciences and in other disciplines such as nursing, and education, narrative research is used extensively. Susan Chase, in her chapter on narrative inquiry in the *Handbook of Qualitative Research* defines a narrative as an oral and written act, occurring in fieldwork, casual conversation and interviews. A narrative may be a short story about a particular event or encounter with another person. It can also be an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life (such as schooling, work, marriage, divorce,) or a narrative of one's entire life.¹⁶ In the 1960s, feminism and the civil rights movement reinvigorated life history studies by criticizing the previous works that alienated or ignored minorities, and scholars began writing and investigating new subjects with particular attention to representation and to voice.

¹⁵ Jeanette Armstrong, "We are the Story, Life Writing as Cultural Medium," in *Tainting History: Essays in life Writing*, ed. Barbara Gabriel, 33-42 (Toronto: Penumbra Press, 2006), 33.

¹⁶ Susan Chase, "Narrative Inquiry: Multiple Lenses, Approaches, and Voices," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, 651-680 (Thousand Oaks, Ca: SAGE Publications, 2004), 652.

Contemporary narrative research is not interested in the truth of an account; rather, it is aware that a story is retrospective, creating meaning by shaping a past experience. In addition, Chase notes, “when researchers treat narration as actively creative and the narrator's voice as particular, they move away from questions about the factual nature of the narrator's statements. Instead, they highlight the versions of self, reality, and experience that the storyteller produces through the telling.”¹⁷

Narrative is not new to historical scholarship; it was arguably the most common type of history produced up until the Second World War. In his 1979 essay on the return to narrative historian Lawrence Stone describes historical narrative as having been primarily descriptive rather than analytical and suggests that it had concentrated on man rather than on circumstances.¹⁸ Stone outlines several major changes in the shift to a new narrative practice in history. Firstly, that the new histories are concerned with the poor and obscure rather than the great and powerful and secondly analysis is as essential to the methodology as description is. Thirdly, historians are opening up new sources (texts) for study, are exploring new methods of analysis (such as psychoanalytic history), and lastly histories are focused on telling a story of a person or event in order to explore the internal workings of past societies and structures.¹⁹ Stone also supports the smaller gaze of what is now called microhistory. He explains that this new trend understands the attempt to

¹⁷ Chase, 656.

¹⁸ Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History," *Past and Present* 85 (November 1979), 3.

¹⁹ Stone, 18.

uncover the “total history of a society, however small, as an impossibility”, while microhistory settles for a story of a single event, community or individual.²⁰

Historical Methods: Microhistory

Microhistory started, according to Carlo Ginzburg, one of the earlier and best-known microhistorians, first in the 1950s but became more widespread in European histories starting in the mid 1970s.²¹ Historian and biographer Jill Lepore draws a definition of microhistory from a recent conference’s call for papers as the “history of ‘hitherto obscure people’ that ‘concentrates on the intensive study of particular lives’ to reveal the ‘fundamental experiences and *mentalités* of ordinary people.’”²² Historian Natalie Zemon Davis, in her forward to *Martin Guerre*, writes microhistory “gave me new ways to think about the connections between the ‘general trends’ of historians and the living experience of the people.”²³ Microhistory was identified with Lawrence Stone’s “return to narrative,” and had a more cross-discipline relationship with other qualitative approaches taken in social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, and archaeology. Microhistory sparked a renewed interest in an in-depth, more localized

²⁰ Stone, 22.

²¹ Carlo Ginzberg, John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know About It," *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. Autumn (1993), 10-13.

²² Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001), 131. See also: Emmanuel Le Roy Laudrie’s *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294-1324* (1975), Carlo Ginzberg’s *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller* (1976) and Natalie Zemon Davis’ *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1983).

²³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983), X.

history and a new take on biography, making it an excellent approach when dealing with individual and small town studies.²⁴

The microhistorical focus on the *exceptional normal* or *exceptional-typical* opens new ground by comparing and contrasting an event or person that does not quite fit in to a previously observed meta-narrative or larger historical school, a microhistorical style of study gives the historian a more focussed picture of a given place and time. This is particularly important when talking about small studies such as the study of May's autobiographical writing and storytelling; it links a historical practise of in-depth and focused work to a larger collection of works, sometimes bringing nuances and sometimes challenging and always adding to a composite of individual histories.

May Barrette is particularly interesting because she is an excellent example of the exceptional-typical. As a woman growing up in a male dominated fur trade society, and as a resident of a remote Métis community, which is outside of the conventionally accepted Métis national homeland, she is positioned as an exceptional individual, even within greater Métis scholarship. Publications that feature voices of both women and British Columbian Métis are in short supply. By looking deeper into this individual world, I intend to echo Davis' discovery of a new connection between women's and Métis history and the individual people who have lived it. In particular, in researching this lesser known but deeply rich life and examining the development of an individual's

²⁴ James Brooks, Christopher R.N. DeCorse and John Walton, "Introduction," in *Small Worlds: Method, Meaning and Microhistory*, ed. James Brooks, Christopher R.N. DeCorse and John Walton, 3-14 (Santa Fe: School For Advanced Research Press, 2008), 4-5.

self narrated history, I hope to fill in a fragment of Métis history - that of the woman in an isolated Métis community that has been, up to this point, overlooked.

Thinkers such as Jean François Lyotard criticize academic attachments to predetermined grand theories, instead suggesting that academic need to question all paradigms, be it scientific methods or historic meta-narratives. Lyotard's work also informs on how research can operate within a postmodern frame. He writes in his examination of the scientific method:

... Dissention... must be emphasized. Consensus is a horizon that is never reached. Research that takes place under the aegis of a paradigm tends to stabilize; it is like the exploitation of a technological, economic, or artistic "idea." It cannot be discounted ... It is necessary to posit the existence of a power that destabilizes the capacity for explanation, manifested in the promulgation of new norms for understanding ...²⁵

The microhistorical examination of the exceptional-typical is an excellent example of Lyotard's "dissention." It cannot be discounted for its inability to fit within a larger paradigm; resistance makes the exceptional-typical worthy of close study. Microhistory allows for research that asks new questions, explores unusual events, and focuses on the *exceptional-normal*. This shift in focus allows and embraces the fractured, multi-lens viewpoints espoused by theorists like Lyotard. By rejecting the idea that any historical event is homogeneous, or that any one historical theory is 100% correct and true, studies, such as work with isolated Métis communities, or communities that occur outside of the traditional Métis scholarship, like the north east of British Columbia, hold interest

²⁵ Jean François Lyotard, "The Contemporary Pragmatics of Scientific Knowledge," in *Rethinking the Subject: An Anthology of Contemporary European Thought*, ed. James Faubion, trans. G Bennington and B. Massumi, 165-178 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 171.

because they reflect a disparate reality.²⁶ One way that disparate viewpoints are expressed in microhistory is through the extensive use of narrative methodologies and biographical histories, however, there is some debate as to what the difference is between microhistory and biography.

Jill Lepore, in her evocatively titled “Historians who love too much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” attempts to tease apart the differences between microhistory and biography.²⁷ She asks the question: why are microhistories, like Ginzberg’s *The Cheese and the Worms* and Davis’ *The Return of Martin Guerre*, not biographies? It goes back to the desire of microhistory to disassociate itself from political and social histories’ focus on meta-narratives. An equivalent of the meta-narrative in biographical and literary history would be the Romantic notion of “The Great Man” and “The Artist,” Roland Barthes writes in *The Death of the Author* “in literature it should be this positivism, the epitome and culmination of capitalist ideology, which has attached the greatest importance to the ‘person’ of the author.”²⁸ Biography and autobiography traditionally were interested in the chronicling of “Great Men.”²⁹ Cruikshank echoes this by saying that traditional men’s biographies are modelled on this heroic literary tradition that projects a confident protagonist overcoming obstacles.³⁰ So, what is the difference?

Lepore posits:

If biography is largely founded on a belief that in the singularity and significance of an individual’s life and his contributions to history, microhistory is founded

²⁶ Matti Peltonen, "Clues, Margins and Monads: the Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research," *History and Theory* 40 (October 2001), 358.

²⁷ Lepore, 129.

²⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Death of The Author," in *Image - Music - Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, 142-148 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.

²⁹ Lepore, 131.

³⁰ Cruikshank, 3.

upon the almost opposite assumption: however singular a person's life may be, the value of examining it lies not in its uniqueness but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole.³¹

Microhistorical goals are different. Although the focus may be on an individual person; the research is not interested in the biographical goal of the complete telling of a life. There is an important difference in how the two disciplines narrate. Biographers tell a story of a entire life from birth to death, while historians do not frame their work in this manner, instead focusing on specific times in a person's life that lend themselves to be analyzed for a particular historical purpose.³² In my research I have not attempted to capture all the years contained in the diaries, instead I have focused on a shorter period of time in order to develop a smaller, and more focused study.

Through close study microhistory attempts to solve a particular mystery, and to evoke a specific sense of time. In the case of this work, the historical purpose is to examine the life of a Métis woman in the Peace River through her stories and diaries. The mystery of what life was like for women is an ongoing research focus that autobiography and biography are well positioned to answer. Women's historians look to autobiography because women wrote differently. Women wrote differently as a result of being absent from both the public sphere and unfamiliar with modes of written narrative."³³

Cruikshank adds that minority women are doubly marginalised, first by the masculinist

³¹ Lepore, 133.

³² Stone, 3.

³³ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "Situating Subjectivity in Women's Autobiographical Practices," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 3-56 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 12.

conventions of what is significant enough to be included in a biography and second by the marginalised position these women hold.³⁴

Ethics

Community consent has become essential in Indigenous community-centred research. The Mi'kmaq College Institute Research Principles and Protocols outline an exceptional example of how partnerships between community and researchers should be negotiated. On the issue of community consultation the research protocol reads:

...all research on the Mi'kmaq is to be approached as a negotiated partnership, taking into account all the interests of those who live in the community(ies). Participants shall be recognized and treated as equals in the research done instead of as 'informants' or 'subjects'.³⁵

With this in mind there were very important questions raised by the UBC Okanagan Regional Ethics Board when community consent was not sought for the research leading to this thesis. The reason that the community³⁶ was not consulted was that my goal was to write a microhistorical biography and as my research is primarily biographical in nature, and involves one individual, May Barrette, community consent was not considered necessary. May Barrette's life history reflects and contributes to a collective understanding of the Métis community, but May's life is her own, and the knowledge she shares is hers to share. In my work as a researcher for UBC Okanagan, I had been privileged to work as a known and active collaborator with the BC Métis community, but

³⁴ Cruikshank, 3.

³⁵ Mi'kmaw Ethics Watch, *Mi'kmaq College Institute Research Principles and Protocols*, 2009, <http://mrc.uccb.ns.ca/prinpro.html> (accessed November 30, 2009).

³⁶ Obtaining community consent regarding Métis research in British Columbia involves requesting permission from the Métis Nation British Columbia who politically represent the Métis of British Columbia.

May Barrette, not the Métis Community writ large, is the consenting research partner in this research. This was, however, not a decision that was taken lightly.

Even presuming that it is unnecessary for Biography and Life Writing to seek Ethics Board clearance, one must ask - what is the need for a more formal code of ethics in biographical writings? Is Life Writing, which includes both biography and autobiography, and can be seen as the most intimate and potentially intrusive type of research, ethical? Simply stated, no. Literature professor Linda Anderson calls autobiography an “unruly and even slightly disreputable field.”³⁷ In his collection of essays on biography and biographers, Michael Holyroyd, the official biographer of George Bernard Shaw, indicates that although respected as a literary form, biography has always been viewed as highly suspect; particularly by its subjects. In his opening chapter entitled “The Case Against Biography” he quotes Oscar Wilde: “all great men have disciples ... but it is always Judas that writes the Biography.”³⁸ Holyroyd equates the professional biographer with a traitor who sells out his own author to the masses. Biographers are in the business of selling the private lives of individuals and their families; the possibility of stepping over an ethical line by misrepresenting your subject for personal gain is obvious; I had to be careful that I was not misrepresenting May. By allowing May to speak in her own words, to share the power over what material was used in the thesis, I was actively respecting her position as a Elder in the community who owns her own knowledge.

³⁷ Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.

³⁸ Michael Holyroyd, *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography* (London: Little Brown and Company, 2002), 4.

New methods of power sharing in research have emerged. Practices like these fall into Participatory Action Research, which includes the adoption of the four R's necessary for this new model of community research: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity and Responsibility.³⁹ Participatory Action Research requires a sharing of power between the research institution (in this case the writer or researcher) and the community. Respectful research initiatives can be a positive and empowering element in giving voice to communities and individuals who had felt silenced. However, ethical guidelines required by funding agencies such as SSHRC can create a dilemma. In the case of a study of the Island Cache, a former community in Prince George, British Columbia, the researchers felt that the anonymity required by the ethics established by the Tri-Council Policy was not necessarily protecting or empowering the individuals involved in the work.⁴⁰ The nature of a small community makes anonymity difficult, particularly when the research is shared with the community. Participants feel that their contributions need to be explicitly acknowledged and this is vital in communities where governing institutions systematically silenced individual voices and stories, as was the case in the Island Cache.⁴¹ In this case, a community wanted their collective stories published in a meaningful way; however, the ethical bodies overseeing the study were in fact censoring the voices by requiring anonymity. Participatory projects work by approaching the biographical individual, not just as a subject worth studying, but also as a partner worthy

³⁹ Verna J Kirkness and Ray Barnhart, "First Nations and Higher Education: The Four Rs-- Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility," *Journal of American Indian Education* 30, no. 3 (1991), 1-12.

⁴⁰ Mike Evans, "Ethics, Anonymity, and Authorship in Community Centered Research Or Anonymity and the Island Cache," *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 60.

⁴¹ Evans, 72.

of mutual respect and reciprocity. One of the discussions that May and I had where this power sharing came into play was when May explained that she did not want her diaries published in their entirety, as this is something that the family felt they may want do one day. Because of that discussion I did not transcribe all the diaries in their entirety. Instead, I only transcribed one section as a reading exercise and then took copious notes on the remainder of diaries. I also chose not to include a full transcription in the thesis in accordance with her wishes.

In *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics in Life Writing* English professor G. Thomas Couser examines the ethics of Life Writing and the ethical responsibilities of the writer and the subject, particularly when the subject is one who is unable to write or make informed decisions on what is written about them. They may be unfairly exploited because they are disadvantaged, disempowered, or marginalized in comparison to their partners or collaborators.⁴² He notes that there is a divide in ethical theory between deontological or duty-based approaches where an action can be justified by recourse to ethical rules and principles and teleological approaches, which justify action, based on consequences. To help explore ethics in biography, Couser applies the deontological approaches developed for use in Bioethics and Anthropology. He identifies four major principles in Bioethics, also known as the Georgetown Mantra, which are: respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, and justice. Of the four major principles, Couser claims the respect for autonomy is essential to ethical Life Writing. Autonomy, which is essentially the right to decide what will happen to one's own person, information about that person, and their secrets, is essential to the discipline of Life Writing in so much as

⁴² G. Thomas Couser, *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics in Life Writing* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 20.

the subject has the right to decide what happens to their stories. However, even when permission is given, it cannot be seen as an absolute waiver, rather, it is more a “willing sacrifice of privacy with the goal of some compensatory benefit.”⁴³ This, of course, is made more difficult when the subject’s vulnerability due to race, class, age, physical state or mental capacity has already led to a further diminished autonomy. Therefore, it is essential that respect for autonomy is not just approached with respectful action, as required by libel laws, but as a considerate attitude towards the subject. Couser sees this as an extension of beneficence similar to that used in the medical profession, where medicine must first promote the welfare of the patient and argues that the biographer should use these guidelines as a meter in which they approach their Life Writing projects.⁴⁴

With all this in mind, the approach for this work was with a concern for respectful and shared research methods. One of the most important elements regarding confidentiality is the recognition that as an Elder, Mrs. Barrette owns her knowledge, and has given her approval to me to use this knowledge. Thus rather than confidentiality, the guidelines for this research were constructed to ensure that she controlled the flow and use of her knowledge. Three documents were prepared to discuss the ethics of the study, an introduction letter, consent to use materials form, and a follow up consent form. All three documents were written in clear, jargon free language so they were clearly accessible to the participant and highlighted the important power sharing elements of this research.

⁴³ Couser, 23.

⁴⁴ Couser, 31.

The ethics protocol is partly reproduced here:

1. All research tools (interview schedules and protocols) will, wherever possible, be developed in consultation with the subject, Mrs. May Barrette. All research tools will be presented to her for approval before implementation.
2. An outline of all research initiatives into archival, census, or other documentary materials will be presented to and cleared by the participants or their representative before implementation.
3. All researchers will maintain the confidentiality of interview materials and written journals except in so far as Mrs. Barrette agrees to release the material for use by the project (see guideline numbers three and four).
4. At the first meeting of the participant and their interviewers, the interviewers will explain the interview process and invite questions from her. She will be informed verbally of her rights within the interview process. After this discussion she will be invited to sign the form consenting to the interview (should she/he refuse, the interview will stop). If consent is given, the interview will proceed.
5. At the conclusion of all interviews, the interviewer will ask again for the participant's consent to transcribe and edit the results of the interview. Verbal approval will be deemed sufficient for this purpose.
6. At this time, several options will be outlined to the participant: The interview tape and transcriptions can be returned to the participant with no further work or use of the interview materials. The participant may grant permission to use the interview for the project, but ask that the materials be returned to her, and not be stored by the project. The participant may grant permission to the project to use and store the material, but restrict who may subsequently access or use this material.
7. The participant may grant permission to use and store the material without any restriction beyond that decided by the researchers and the participant.
8. A post-interview informed consent form (containing a clear discussion of their options) will be presented and verbally explained to the participant for her to sign (or not).
9. Full copies of all tapes, journals, transcripts, and publications resulting from this project will be supplied to: Mrs. Barrette, any other participants or her immediate family
10. The Supervising Faculty (unless requested otherwise by the participants or Mrs. Barrette) will keep a copy of all tapes, transcripts, and publications arising from the project.
11. Mrs. Barrette, and any other participants will receive one copy of the tape and transcripts of their interview, and a copy of all publications arising from the overall project.
12. Copyright of the final edited volume arising from the project will be transferred to the Mrs. Barrette. However, any portions of the volume of an analytical nature produced by students or faculty working on the project may be reproduced or used by the individual(s) involved for scholarly publications, providing that guideline "8" is followed.
13. Mrs. Barrette will define her role in any subsequent use of the material collected in the final volume for all subsequent community focused work. Mrs. Barrette

will define the participation of the current UBCO research participants, and their roles.⁴⁵

Fieldwork and Collection of Materials

The fieldwork took place in Fort St. John over a one-month period from July and August 2009. As per the research protocol, I travelled to Fort St. John, British Columbia from Kelowna, where I reside, and conducted interviews with Mrs. Barrette about the content of the diaries and photographed and digitally archived the diaries as May saw fit.

I met with May Barrette for the first time on July 20th 2009. We kept the first meeting short, and followed the research guidelines. I, as the interviewer explained the interview process to May and her husband Bob Barrette and invited questions from them. I informed both of them verbally of their rights within the interview process (i.e. the right to speak, and the right to refuse any question, the right to have present anyone they wished during the interview, and a person to contact, [my supervisor Mike Evans,] to inform if any difficulties arise during the interview.) After this discussion, I left *The Métis Diaries in Fort St. John and the Northern Peace: Project – Consent to use materials* form with May and Bob Barrette. Both May and Bob signed the form, as they were both present during the interviews. On our subsequent meeting on July 23, May and Bob were invited to sign the consent form allowing for interviews and the collection of interview materials (see Appendices II-V). Both Bob and May Barrette readily gave

⁴⁵ See Appendix III *Métis Diaries in Fort St. John and the Northern Peace: Project – Consent to use materials*.

consent, and the first interviews were recorded. Although May was the primary speaker, Bob occasionally added to the discussion.

The diaries were collected at May and Bob Barrette's home. I photographed each page with a digital camera; I was never alone with the diaries as I was always in the presence of May or her husband Bob. The images were then uploaded to a computer⁴⁶ and then combined into pdf files. These were then backed up in their raw form onto a portable hard drive as well in their raw form on the camera's flash drive. The interviews were recorded on two devices, a mini disc recorder and a backup tape recorder. As much as possible I have worked with the digital files from the mini disc recorder, as the quality is far superior. However in a few instances the tape conversations have been used. Like the diaries, the digital files were first uploaded to a laptop and then transferred to a backup hard drive. The taped conversations were digitized when a backup copy was necessary. All tapes and the mini discs have been placed in the archives as noted in the ethics protocols. Mrs. and Mr. Barrette were not at all intimidated or influenced by the recording devices, and I found that they did not impede the flow of discussion at all. The interview recordings were transcribed in their entirety once I returned to Kelowna. The photographs of the pages of the diaries were combined sequentially into a single pdf document for each diary, effectively making a digital pdf of each of the volumes. May often showed me photographs while we talked, and with her additional verbal permission, digital scans of the photos were then taken and uploaded to a laptop.

One of the largest challenges was in learning to read the diaries. Phillippe Lejeune, a historian who works exclusively with French women's diaries, speaks of the

⁴⁶ The files were all password protected.

process and challenges of learning how to read handwritten diaries. He says, “it is impossible to skim the text or anticipate the next page. Large slanting handwriting, adorned capital letters and the very light colour of the fading ink prevent easy reading.”⁴⁷

In order to train myself to read the texts as closely and carefully as possible I chose to transcribe one of the diaries first. Starting from the beginning I transcribed in its entirety the earliest diary, written from 1949-53. Transcription helped me to be intimately comfortable with the format, the style of writing, reading May’s handwriting and personal details of the entries such as spellings, names etc. The transcription was done using a voice translator called MacSpeech Dictate. The Diaries were read into a microphone and the program typed them on to a word processing program. For the transcription, I copied the diary exactly as it appeared on the page with five yearly entries for a single date in each section, rather than writing the entries sequentially. This was done to most closely copy the diary’s structure and form. The 1949-53 diary, when transcribed, totalled approximately 140 single spaced pages and about 46 800 words. Once I had finished transcribing the 1949-53 diary and I had become more comfortable with the format, and May’s style of writing, I switched my focus from transcription to a close reading of the diaries. To do this I read each diary at least twice, once to get a general idea of the year’s events and a second time taking detailed notes on each page’s contents. To do this I used the comment function on Adobe Acrobat. That allowed me to mark important entries next to where they appeared on the page, to identify important events, make notes on the individuals mentioned in the entries, note recurring themes,

⁴⁷ Philippe Lejeune, "The 'Journal de Jeunesse Fille' in Nineteenth Century France," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, trans. Martine Breillac, 107-122 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press), 110.

and identify items that needed further research or investigation. As noted above I did not transcribe the diaries in their entirety, as per May's request. I also created a family tree in a genealogy program called Mac Family Tree with individual family member's information so I could keep personal details, such as date of birth, children, spouses, etc. of the family members organized and keep track of who was and who was not appearing in the diaries.

The interviews were loosely structured to allow May to freely offer whatever information she saw fit. All interviews were done at May's home in order to keep the interviews as relaxed and comfortable as possible, as well as taking into consideration Mr. and Mrs. Barrette's limited mobility. As most of her answers were in the form of lengthy storytelling, an open interview structure was deemed the best choice. I did come with questions to every interview and as May is elderly, interviews were kept to a few hours and were directed mostly by her, with me asking guiding questions. I must emphasize that the fact that May is elderly, did not in any way affect the clarity or comprehensiveness of any of her answers. The length of the interview was in order not to tire her or her husband Bob. Also, at the conclusion of each interview, I suggested questions that May might want to discuss at our next meeting. This was done to give her an opportunity to consider what she may or may not have wanted to discuss at the following meeting and to give her time to formulate answers.

In working with May, two pieces of scholarship were kept as a guide for the interview process, Julie Cruikshank's *Life Lived like a Story* and Mike Evans' *What is it to be a Métis*. Cruikshank notes that when posing questions to her Elders a short answer was often given, followed by a lengthier story. She writes, "with practice I learned to

follow the complex plots and to understand that when women told me stories they were actually using them to explain some aspect of their lives with me.”⁴⁸ My experience echoed much of Cruikshank’s. May’s answers were rarely direct, and usually involved a personal story to illustrate what part of the question she felt needed to be addressed. For example, when I asked May why she started writing diaries she responded with a lengthy story about her coming to Fort St. John as a pioneer in the 1930s, and with an important mention that she had been moved to a place where there was no school for her to attend.⁴⁹

Me: Okay, so May, tell me a little bit about when you first started writing diaries.

May: When I first started school. There was no school where we moved. See we moved in 1930 from Mannville, Alberta and our friends were across the Saskatchewan border. There was five covered wagons come over. My dad was looking for land for his horses and John-- Jim Anderson was looking for land for his cattle and he had a mean bull, too. And there was no fences. Nothing was surveyed. So-- and then Walter Pyle, his cattle’s feet were bleeding by the time we got to Blue Sky so he stopped there for the winter and some of his cattle died because of starvation. But by the time he got here in ‘31, the land was all taken so he moved to Buick.⁵⁰

It was through listening to the story and working through the narrative that an answer to the question emerged. For May, keeping diaries was a way of maintaining her lifelong passion for education that allowed her also to take on the role as an active chronicler of events. Additionally, they were a way to continue writing, which was a form of self-education after being moved from Manville where she had access to school to Fort St. John, which as May mentions, did not even have fences.

⁴⁸ Cruikshank, 14.

⁴⁹ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 23, 2009).

⁵⁰ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

Although the three interviews were only taken over a couple of weeks, and were about six hours in total, they were suitably varied and in-depth. They covered much of May's life and were absolutely foundational in the undertaking of this research partnership. As Charlotte Linde mentions, even a brief interview allows that "a cross section of a life story, taken at a single moment in time, contains a large enough number of narratives and their relations to permit us to study the creation of coherence."⁵¹ As Cruikshank notes, storytelling does not occur in a vacuum, an audience must be present. I took on the role of audience, more than that of researcher in my interviews with May.⁵² At the conclusion of the last interview a post-interview consent form, the *Follow Up: Participant Consent to Use Photography, Archival, and Interview Material* was presented and verbally explained to May and Bob Barrette. I returned the following day to pick up the signed form and returned to Kelowna to start working with the data.

During my time in the north I also travelled to several museums, archives, and fur trade forts in order to collect supplementary archival materials. I consulted archives at the South Peace Archives in Grande Prairie AB, the North Peace Museum and Archives in Fort St. John, The Pouce Coupe Museum in Pouce Coupe BC, The Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Alberta, South Peace Historical Society & Archives in Grande Prairie, The Smoky River Historical and Genealogical Society in Donnelly, Alberta and the Hudson Hope Museum in Hudson's Hope BC.

⁵¹ Charlotte Linde, *Life Stories: the Creation of Coherence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52.

⁵² Cruikshank, 14.

Chapter 3: The History of Fort St. John and the Peace River

*And then she said to me, "And if you're alive and the city decides to build apartment houses here, I have donated this land to the city for a park. Only a park, not condominiums or anything like that."
She said, "It's for a green spot for the city.
It's going to be a city believe it or not," she said.
And it is.*

May Barrette

Fort St. John is a city of about 19,457 residents that services over 50,000 people in the outlying areas; it has a total land area of about 23 square km. It is located in the Peace River Regional District, 464 km north of Prince George via Hudson's Hope, and 408 km south of Fort Nelson.¹ Although it was officially incorporated in 1947, it is one of the oldest settled areas in what is now British Columbia. "The Peace" refers to a river, a district and a community. The river, one of the main rivers in the Mackenzie River District, originates in the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia and runs into Lesser Slave Lake in Alberta. It is 1923 km long and has a drainage area of 302 500 km^{3,2} The Peace Region runs alongside the Peace River and spans much of north-east Alberta and north-west BC, originating at the western tip of Lesser Slave Lake and running east-west to present day Hudson's Hope in British Columbia.³

¹ Province of British Columbia, "Fort St. John Community Facts," *Government of British Columbia: BC Stats*, 2009, <http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/dd/facsheet/cf263.pdf> (accessed April 23, 2010).

² Natural Resources Canada, *The Atlas Of Canada: Rivers*, August 17, 2009, <http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/learningresources/facts/rivers.html> (accessed April 21, 2010).

³ Arthur J Ray, "Treaty 8: A British Columbian anomaly," *BC Studies* 123 (Autumn 1999), 7.

The area around what is now Fort St. John has been inhabited, according to archaeologist David Burley, for approximately 10,500 years.⁴ In 1793, when Alexander Mackenzie first travelled through the Peace River looking for an interior route to the Pacific he remarked, “this magnificent theatre of nature has all the decorations which the trees and animals of the country can afford it: groves of poplars in every shape vary the scene; and their intervals are enlivened with vast herds of elks and buffaloes: the former choosing the uplands, and the latter preferring the plains.”⁵

The Peace was inhabited, by Mackenzie’s time, by two First Nations, the Sekani and the Beaver. The Beaver, who call themselves *Dunne-za* (the real people), and the Sekani *Tsé-kéh-ne* (people on the rocks or mountains) remain in the area to this day and are both speakers of northern Athapaskan languages. Crees had been moving west into what had traditionally been Beaver and Sekani territory throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As a result, altercations between the Beaver, Sekani and the Cree effectively moved the Beaver and Sekani even further west. The name of the area “The Peace River” was taken from a truce forged between the Beaver and Cree at what is now known as Peace Point, near where the Peace River meets with Lake Athabasca. Burley notes, “hostilities between Beaver and Cree and Sekani groups continued and heavily influenced the development of the fur trade in the Peace River Valley.”⁶

⁴ David V. Burley, J. Scott Hamilton and Knut R. Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 5.

⁵ Alexander Mackenzie, "The Discovery of the Canyon," in *Peace River Chronicles*, ed. Gordon E. Bowes, 23-28 (Edmonton: Prescott Publishing Company, 1963), 23.

⁶ David V. Burley, J. Scott Hamilton and Knut R. Fladmark, *Prophecy of the Swan: Upper Peace River Fur Trade of 1794-1823* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 14.

The Fur Trade in the Peace

The “Magnificent theatre of Nature” mentioned by Mackenzie brought the fur trade to the Peace River in the early 1800s. Mackenzie and his partners in the North West Company saw the Peace River as an ideal place for both trade and provisioning, and to that end Mackenzie established Rocky Mountain Fort the following year. The fort ran from 1794-1804 and was then replaced by Rocky Mountain Portage House, which was established in 1804 by John Stewart MacDougall at what is now Hudson’s Hope. Fraser and MacDougall additionally established a new post farther south at McLeod Lake in 1805 effectively opening the fur trade in what came to be known as New Caledonia.⁷ However, both Rocky Mountain Portage and McLeod’s Lake were located in Sekani territory, and made it difficult for the Beaver to trade so St John’s was established in 1806 at the mouth of what is now known as the Beaton River. Trade was flourishing in the North Peace, and provisioning this trade was possible due to the abundance of wildlife. Harmon describes the success of the St. John’s post: “we found McGillvary &c. who informs me that they do not want for a staff of life as Moose, Deer and Buffalo are tolerably plentiful thereabouts.”⁸

It was this plentiful stock of furs that led the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1815 to attempt to enter the Athabasca trade. This move by the Hudson’s Bay Company, led by Colin Roberson and John Clarke, to establish forts along Lesser Slave Lake, the Athabasca River and on the Peace River exacerbated the tensions between the HBC and

⁷ Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, 26-28.

⁸ D.W. Harmon, "A Fur Traders Journal," in *Peace River Chronicles*, ed. Gordon E. Bowes, 33-37 (Edmonton: Prescott Publishing Co., 1964), 36.

the North West Company. The Hudson's Bay Company efforts were initially disastrous and interference by the North West Company led to many of the Hudson's Bay Company men starving to death because of the lack of provisions.⁹ The Hudson's Bay Company continued to try to make inroads in to the new district and met with some moderate successes in 1817 and 1818. The Hudson's Bay Company's luck in the area took a turn when the new Governor of the Northern Department, George Simpson, took charge of the company's activities in the area. James Murray Yale was sent to build a post in October 1820 directly opposite to St John's at the former location of Rocky Mountain Fort. This put the HBC and NWC posts within a stone throw of one another. However, a year later in 1821, everything changed when there was a merger of the two rival companies. The new Hudson's Bay Company, led by Simpson, now owned a virtual trade monopoly in Western North America.

With the merger came a consolidation of resources and many forts in the area were closed or merged. The Hudson's Bay Company established Fort d'Epinette to replace St. John's, which joined Fort Chippewan, Fort Vermillion, Fort Dunvegan and Great Slave Lake as the posts operating in the area. Fort d'Epinette was to be the final stage of trade through the Peace River Canyon. It was decided in 1823 as supplies and furs dwindled and as most of the trade was being done with the Sekani, that it would be best to move the post to the Rocky Mountain Portage site. Effectively cutting the Beaver off from the post, the backlash from this decision was severe. The Beaver retaliated and murdered the post's clerk Guy Hughes and four others, in what is known as the "St John's Massacre." The murders effectively ended trade in the region for the next 40

⁹ Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, 33-35.

years.¹⁰ Simpson made the decision to close all the posts on the Peace upstream of Fort Vermillion . Historian J.G. MacGregor notes that closing these posts was “a much more drastic punishment than killing a few Indians in retaliation would have been.” This was more than a slap on the wrist; this action taken by the HBC effectively starved to death many of the Beavers in the vicinity.¹¹

It was not just the local Beaver and Sekani who traded at the posts; as in other areas, the HBC and the NWC encouraged the employment of freemen at the posts. According to Nicole St. Onge between 1763 and 1821 the NWC hired over 9,000 Voyageurs and hivernant for its northwest trade. About half of these men worked as winterers in the remotest areas of the northwest. With the 1804 merger of the NWC and the X Y Company there was an influx of new freemen. This prompted numerous complaints from wintering partners angry that French Canadians and Iroquois employees were becoming freemen and were now roaming the interior with their native-born wives and mixed race children.¹² In the Peace River areas many of the freemen were Métis, as well as Quebecois and Iroquois. Common names that appeared in the area, and are still prevalent are Calihoo, Testawits, Monkman, Cardinal, Lafleur, and Gladue.¹³

The Fort was re-opened in 1860, under the name Fort St. John, just in time for the influx of miners and trappers on route to the Klondike. Many of the prospectors such as

¹⁰ Burley, Hamilton and Fladmark, 128.

¹¹ J.G. MacGregor, *The Land of Twelve Foot Davis: A History of the Peace River Country* (Edmonton: The Institute of Applied Art Ltd, 1952), 172.

¹² Nicole St. Onge, "Early Forefathers to the Athabasca Métis: Long Term North West Company Employees," in *The Long Journey of a Forgotten People: Métis Identities and Family Histories* , 109-162 (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 109-110.

¹³ David W. Leonard and Victoria Lemieux, *The Lure of the Peace River Country 1872 - 1919: A Fostered Dream* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 2003), 12.

Henry John Moberly, Alex Mackenzie, and the legendary “Twelve” Foot Davis came through the Peace River as a land route and shared their time prospecting in the summer and trading in the winter. H.J. Moberly, a trader and miner, describes the arrangement he made with two Edmonton prospectors: “Cust and Carey persuaded me to join their enterprise. I invested twelve hundred dollars but refused to take an active part in the trade, preferring to hunt and trap. After looking the country over I decided to make my home fifteen miles south of the portage on a lake which now bears my name on the maps... no Indians frequented the spot, and I had a hunters paradise all to myself.”¹⁴ This influx of miners led to a semi-permanent settlement pattern along the Peace River, as the Métis and Iroquois freemen, alongside the newcomers began to settle along the river and the south lakes.¹⁵ There was also a push by the churches to convert the local people. Priests such as Father Lacombe, Father Tissier and Anglican Alfred Cambell Garrioch established missions at Dunvegan and Fort Vermillion. One of the first permanent agricultural settlements was a farm set up in the Peace River was by Reverend John Gough Brick at the Smoky River Mission, now the town of Shaftsbury.¹⁶

The Settlement Debate

By the 1870s-1900s, encouraged by 1891 railway arrival in Edmonton, there was a developing debate on the Peace River’s appeal as a potential agricultural settlement. There were voices both dissenting and assenting on the settlement of the Peace. Charles Hortensky, a booster for extending the railway into the Peace and his companion,

¹⁴ H.J. Moberly, "The Monopoly is Broken: 1865-68," in *Peace River Chronicles*, ed. Gordon E. Bowes, 67-71 (Edmonton: Prescott Publishing Co., 1952), 67.

¹⁵ Leonard and Lemieux, 11.

¹⁶ Leonard and Lemieux, 12.

geologist John Macoun, were both early proponents for agricultural development in the Peace, Hortensky calling it the “future garden of the west.”¹⁷ Macoun wrote in his official report dated 1873 that the: “prairie vegetation is almost identical to that of Edmonton, save for a few eastern species. This being so can we not, with justice, say that what they raise in Edmonton can likewise be raised on the plains bordering the Peace River?”¹⁸ However the geologist Warburton Pike warned against the encouragement of settlement, commenting that “lets have no more talk of sending poor settlers to starve in a land unable to supply food to the Indian, who is accustomed to a life of continual struggle with a restless nature.”¹⁹ This scathing criticism, printed in his book *The Barren Ground of Northern Canada* was missing one very important point, that settlers were already making their way to the area.

W.F. Butler, in his published journals makes mention of one such case, and the dispute that followed. Although only 16 years old, the Fort at St. John was in poor shape and needed to be rebuilt. Butler describes the state of the Fort: “The Fort of St John is a very tumble-down old place; it stands on the south shore of the river, some thirty feet above the high water level; close behind its ruined buildings the ridges rise 1,000 feet.”²⁰ Butler also noted that that the new fort would be constructed at the location of an older Fort and on land that was sometimes occupied by a local trappers. One trapper known as (Nigger) Dan Williams disputed the movement of the HBC’s new buildings into the area

¹⁷ Charles Hortensky, "The Future Garden of The West," in *Peace River Chronicles*, ed. Gordon E. Bowes, 86-88 (Edmonton: Prescott Publishing, 1952), 86.

¹⁸ John Macoun, "An Early Description of the Country," in *Peace River Chronicles*, ed. Gordon E. Bowes, 89-92 (Edmonton: Prescott Publishing, 1952), 90.

¹⁹ Warburton Pike, *The Barren Ground Of Northern Canada* (New York: MacMillan & Co, 1892), 224.

²⁰ W.F. Butler, *The Wild North Land* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low, & Searle, 1873), 214.

where he had lived on and off for several years. Butler, as Justice of the Peace for Rupert's Land, issued a judgment on the dispute that read:

JUDICIAL MEMORANDUM.

Various circumstances having occurred in the neighbourhood of the Hudson's Bay Fort, known as St. John's, on the Peace River, of a nature to lead to the assumption that a breach of the peace is liable to arise out of the question of disputed ownership, in a plot of land on the north shore of the river, on which the Hudson's Bay Company have erected buildings to serve as their future place of business, and on which it is asserted one Daniel Williams, a person of colour formerly lived, this is to notify all persons concerned in this question, that no belief of ownership, no former or present.²¹

The official judgment, though impossible to enforce in any practical way, does illustrate the larger issue - people had begun to settle to some degree or another in the Peace, and there was no governmental organization overseeing of the process. Local First Nations had previously petitioned the government to begin a treaty process in the 1890s but the petition fell on deaf ears. Ray writes; "By the mid 1880s it was the federal government's policy to negotiate treaties only with Aboriginal petitioners who lived on lands that Canada required for immediate development."²² However, with the influx of people from the Klondike gold rush and after finally recognizing the benefits for settlement in the area, the government began to look into bringing in treaty to extinguishing the title of the long-term inhabitants of the Peace - the First Nations, and the Métis - and begin settlement.

²¹ Butler, 219.

²² Arthur J Ray, "Treaty 8: A British Columbian anomaly," *BC Studies* 123 (Autumn 1999), 10.

Treaty 8

The Treaty 8 commission was initiated in 1899 to facilitate the process of extinguishing First Nations and Métis title to the northwest. After years of lobbying and the successful Rebellion in Manitoba resulting in the Manitoba Act of 1870, the Canadian Government began a lengthy process to extinguish Métis land title, called the “Half-Breed Scrip Commission.” Commissions were held firstly in Manitoba and subsequently moved westward. Three different Commissions were held over much of what is now known as Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. In these areas Half-Breed Scrip was offered in either money or land in order to achieve extinguishment of Métis’ treaty rights. The Athabasca Half-Breed Commission was an extension of the North-West Commission that followed the Treaty 8 party across the Northern Athabasca region. See Figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1 Map of Treaty 8 (Library and Archives Canada RG10 Vol. 3750 File 29,858-10)

The first Treaty 8 Commission ran from May 29, 1899 to September 23, 1899 and was held in Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River Crossing, Fort Dunvegan, Wolverine Point, Fort Vermilion, Fort Chipewyan, Smith's Landing, Fort McMurray, Lake Wabasca, Pelican Portage, Grand Rapids, Calling River Portage, Athabasca Landing, and Wapiscan. An Adhesions committee was held from 5 June, 1901, to 19 December, 1901 at Fort St. John, Lesser Slave Lake, Peace River Landing, Vermilion, Chipewyan, Fort McMurray, and Wapiscow.²³ The need for an adhesions committee was due to the high

²³ Jeffery S. Murray, "A Guide to the Records of the Metis Scrip Commissions in the National Archives of Canada," *Library and Archives Canada*, 1994,

degree of uncertainty on the part of the government and lack of participation by the local First Nations, such as the Nations around Hay River and Whitefish Lake, in the initial treaty.²⁴ The first treaty party missed many areas, such as Fort St. John, Sturgeon Lake and Fort Resolution. The situation in the north-west was quite different than the central prairies, as, unlike most of the First Nations on the Plains, the northern groups did not live in “tribal communities.” For the Beaver and Sekani, the idea of living in dense settled-on reserves was seen as a threat to their traditional way of life.²⁵

One element of the Treaty 8 commission that was markedly different from the other commissions was who was eligible for Treaty and who was eligible for scrip. O.C. Edwards, who was employed as a Dr. by the second Treaty 8 party described the process as follows:

These so called Indians of the north are all half breeds and in dealing with them the commissioners have allowed them to choose under which head they shall be paid. If they choose ‘treaty’ than they are written down Indians, if they select ‘scrip’ then they are called half-breeds.²⁶

This flexibility has had serious consequences, contributing to the still ongoing issues facing status and non-status Indians in Alberta and BC.²⁷ An example would be the Loon River Cree First Nation, who were missed in the original two Treaty 8 Commissions, and

http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/0201200112_e.html (accessed 15 January 2010).

²⁴ O.C. Edwards, *On the North Trail: The Treaty 8 Diary of O.C. Edwards*, ed. David Leonard and Beverly Whalen (Historical Society of Alberta, 1999), ix.

²⁵ David Leonard, *Delayed Frontier: The Peace River Country to 1909* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1995), 18.

²⁶ Edwards, 53.

²⁷ Ray, 55-56; Patricia K. Sawchuk, "The Historic Interchangeability of Status of Métis and Indians: An Alberta Example," in *The Recognition of Aboriginal Rights*, ed. Samuel W. Corrigan and Joe Sawchuk, 58 (Brandon: Bearpaw Publishing, 1996)

have had their non-designation as non-status communities subsequently changed by the federal government, becoming reserves, as recently as the 1990s.²⁸

One distinct difference between the Hudson's Hope and Fort St. John Commissions and the other Treaty 8 Commissions, was the difficulty of settling treaty, which extended into the new boundaries of British Columbia. B.C. had become a province on 20 July 1871; the Peace River Block, which was part of the Treaty 8 negotiations, was ceded to British Columbia in 1884 in exchange for Railway rights.²⁹ Not offering treaty at all to the groups that lived west of the new provincial boundary was strongly discouraged by the Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed on advice from Chief Factor MacDougall. In 1898 he wrote:

... that the Indians of St. John's and Hudson's Hope although in British Columbia, really belong to the Beavers, who extend from the Mountains to Little Red River. The Indians at Fort Wrigley, Nelson and Liard also although living in British Columbia, practically form part of bands included in the proposed Treaty, and even should their present hunting grounds be excluded, it will be for the Department's consideration whether it would not be well to include themselves.³⁰

Although treaty went forward in the Peace River Block, the province never approved it and was in the midst of a power struggle with the Dominion government concerning who should be policing the First Nations of the area. This followed several confrontations that had arisen in the Chilcotin in 1864 (and thereafter), at Metlakatla in 1886, in the Kootenay Valley in 1887, and on the Skeena River in 1887-8. Going forward with a Treaty raised unresolved federal-provincial issues. Signing a treaty involved recognizing the existence of Aboriginal title in British Columbia territory and compensating First

²⁸ Christine Schreyer, "Nehiyawewin Askîhk: Cree Language on the Land: Language Planning Through Consultation in the Loon River Cree First Nation," *Current Issues in Language Planning*, (2009), 448.

²⁹ Leonard, *Delayed Frontier*, 226.

³⁰ Ray, 29.

Nations for its extinguishment, and this flew in the face of provincial policy as British Columbia had refused to recognise any Aboriginal title within the province. However, a move by the province to block the treaty would “threaten peace in the northeast, undermine the federal provincial policing agreement, and strain relations with the federal government at a time when the province was seeking financial assistance for various Klondike-related projects.”³¹ Considering how contentious the treaty issue itself was it is not surprising that only treaty was offered in the Peace River Block section of Treaty 8 - Half-Breed scrip was not offered at all to anyone living in what was now the Province of British Columbia.

The Last Great West

The Treaty’s work officially complete in 1901. Alberta entered confederation in 1905, and the Peace River was prepared for settlement. A proposed rail line that was to run from Spirit River to Pouce Coupe was abandoned, and a there was a new rail line proposed, called J.D, McArthur central Canada Railway, that would extend from Peace River Crossing and continue to Fort St. John. Fort St. John was surveyed and opened up to settlement in 1913 with a Land Office established in 1917.³² Grants were awarded to long-term occupants of the area, such as the HBC, Revillion Frères and the Anglican Diocese. Frank Beatton, the Chief Trader at Fort St. John was also one of the first to file

³¹ Ray, 38.

³² David W. Leonard, *The Last Great West: The Agricultural Settlement of the Peace River Country To 1914* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, 2005), 619.

for occupancy just before the land offices were opened. By the end of 1914, eighty-five applicants had applied for land around Fort St. John.³³

The Peace River began to market itself as the “Last Great West” and the Peace River Board of Trade produced advertisements to lure more settlers to the area. The promises made were vast:

With an area of 26,000 square miles this district offers advantages to the settler unsurpassed in the Prairie Provinces, All that the home builder would have are here; land for many thousands land that will grow almost all that can be raised within the temperate zone; timber for building and fuel; and great coal beds to supply the latter need when the forests are exhausted.³⁴

The availability of arable land is stressed in the pamphlet, as are the attractions of the individual communities; Peace River Crossing is claimed to have such luxuries listed as a laundryman, butcher, baker, harness-maker, shoemaker, carpenters, contractors, painters, decorators, druggist, lawyer, dentist and physician. A second pamphlet was released in 1920 to answer questions asked by prospective settlers. It outlines the process for land application and the requirements of a settler, i.e. residency and minimum cultivation requirements, and an overview of the climate and growing season. The pamphlet also shows the rapid development of the Peace River, particularly in regards to transportation; it advertises a road from Edmonton, which would connect the Peace to the major southern travel routes, and was to be completed in 1926. It is worth noting that the Peace River is directly connected to Edmonton, which has long served as its urban hub; ease of travel to Edmonton continued to be essential for the homesteaders. The highway ran from Edmonton north to Lesser Slave Lake and then West through Grande Prairie where it

³³ Leonard, *The Last Great West*, 622-623.

³⁴ Peace River Board of Trade, "The Peace River Country: The Last Great West" (Peace River, Alberta, 1914).

meets with the road that runs from Dawson Creek to Fort St. John. (In the 1950s this road was reconstructed as mile zero of the Alaska Highway). Water travel was still one of the major methods of transportation and the pamphlet contained a photo of the D.A. Thomas, a steamer operated by the Alberta & Arctic transportation company and of the E.D. & B.C. (Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia) Railway, taken over by the CPR in 1920 which operated shipping and passenger from Edmonton to Spirit River.³⁵

Fort St. John of the 1920s is described by R.D Symons in his introduction to Monica Storrs diaries as a:

little crossroads village ... which was now built a fur traders store, a log 'hotel' or stopping house, an Indian sub-agency, a police post, and a small Chinese eating house, all of which accompanied the freighters, the teamsters, and the landseekers. There was also a telegraph station of the Yukon telegraph line. The village was also connected with Grande Prairie in Alberta by a rough wagon road, while a wooden cable-ferry too travellers and their beasts across the Peace.³⁶

In the next twenty years the town would start to develop, even without the encouragement of a railway. Churches were built by missionaries like Monica Storrs, who was responsible for the raising of funds and building of both the Anglican churches in Fort St. John, and Baldonnel in August of 1931.³⁷ North Pine School, a one-room schoolhouse, was opened in 1930.³⁸ The Providence Hospital had been set up in Fort St. John by Roman Catholic Sisters who ran schools and hospitals in frontier areas, and the Cecil Lake outpost hospital, known as the Gough Memorial Outpost, was built with the help of

³⁵ Peace River Board of Trade, "The Peace River country: a booklet of information in condensed form on the topography, development and opportunities for settlement in the most famous farming district in Western Canada" (Peace River: Peace River Printing Co., 1920), 7.

³⁶ Monica Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931*, ed. W.L Morton (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), xlvii.

³⁷ Storrs, 241.

³⁸ Cora Ventress, Marguerite Davies and Edith Kylo, *The Peacemakers of the North Peace* (Fort St. John: Davies, Ventress and Kylo, 1973), 307.

Monica Storrs in the winter of 1934-1935 to service the residents of the new settlement of Cecil Lake.³⁹ It was here in 1931, that May Barrette and her family moved from Mannville Alberta, to become some of the first settlers there.

³⁹ Ventress, Davies and Kylo, 384.

Chapter 4: Diaries

May: I used to stutter so much that I couldn't carry a conversation.

Me: Really?

May: It's just nerves, eh. So I took a course in public speaking and, oh, it was wonderful. It changed my view of life and-- it helped. It's still helping.

Me: Well, you're a storyteller now.

May: Yeah. [laughs] That's right

Fort St. John is an area where there are still original settlers like May Barrette who are alive to tell their stories of what life was like growing up on the frontier. What makes May so wonderful is her diary keeping and storytelling, which are rich sources of historical information. Working together with May and her stories and diaries I am able to construct one women's experience of day-to-day life in the Peace River. May's diaries as a mnemonic device and unpacked via critical diary approaches, help to narrate and represent important events in May's life. Combined with the oral history, this creates a powerful story and helps illustrate the lived experience of an exceptional-typical woman in the frontier of Fort St. John.

May Barrette

Diaries, like May's, are the cornerstones of research into women's history; they are intriguing, illuminating, typical and at times mundane. Biographer Thomas Mallon writes, "the history of women is being written as much from their diaries as anything else. And the social history all people is more detailed than it would otherwise be because of women's attention to the texture of the everyday in the diaries their men permitted them." This texture that Mallon refers to is the ongoing examination of the everyday, such as

household chores, the comings and goings of the family, the weather, catching rides and interactions with neighbours, the typical half of the exceptional-typical.

May's position as an aboriginal autobiographer, and her choice of writing about everyday subjects and the actions of others is a particular nod to the community element of aboriginal autobiography. May's written voice constitutes a multi-vocal self. Her writing and choice of subject may seem to be lacking individuality, but that's the point.¹ May is writing her story, as well as the story of her family and her wider community. These are things that every woman May knew would have experienced on a day-to-day basis. The exceptional element is that May wrote it down, and understands it as important enough to share, through her diaries and her storytelling.

May Barrette has been a lifelong diarist. She began writing a diary when she was young and was first starting school back in 1930 in Mannville Alberta. She continued writing right up until her wedding in 1942 where, the eve of her wedding night, May burned all her childhood journals:

Me: ... what made you decide to start writing in a journal? You said you wrote when you were little?

May: Yes, and then the day before my wedding I burnt them.

Me: You burnt them?

May: Yeah, I tore them up and burnt them... So Bob arrived and he said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'I'm burning my diaries. I'm burning my childhood.' I said, 'I'm starting a new life.' But I didn't get the diary until he bought me one in '49 and then I kept it up since then.

¹ Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Autobiography," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidone Smith and Julia Watson, 168-178 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 169.

May still has all the diaries she has written since 1949. The older diaries are kept in the bedroom in a cubbyhole above May's bed amongst a collection of other books, but the most recent diaries sit on the kitchen table, within easy reach of May and her family.

When I asked May "what do you like about writing in a diary?" She told me: "Well, if an argument breaks out I can look it up and that's the end of the fight."² On further discussion, she indicated that the detailing of important events makes the diaries important to the family. When mentioning why she wrote she gave the example of her son's accident, "in '74 Roger burned at the plant. So I thought I should have some kind of record of it because he wasn't supposed to live but he did."³

Me: So you said that the family really likes your diaries.

May: Yeah, they do, because I've come home here and found them scattered and I said, "What are you looking for?" "We're looking for something," and, "Approximately what year?" And then I found it, um-hum.

Me: So the kids have read through most of the diaries?

May: Oh, yeah. Yes, there's nothing there that they can't-- they can see everything. Um-hum.

Me: That's neat.

May: And then I have a book on current events that I have scrapbooks for, about 25 of them or so and then I have obituary books so anybody can ask me when so-and-so passed away or-- it's there.

Me: Is it-- why is it important to you to keep that stuff?

May: I don't know. It's because there's people we should have lost and didn't...⁴

² May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 23, 2009).

³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁴ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

This need to remember events is the most striking element of the diaries. They are filled with annals, events, anniversaries, deaths, and other daily occurrences.

Like the Victorian diaries discussed by Jane Hunter, May's diaries fulfil a similar purpose. Hunter notes that diaries were encouraged to train the writer to act and think in a more orderly manner, and the entries were also to reflect this need for structure. The recommended routine of writing about the weather, mail, money spent, starting of finishing school, visits, etc... create a tidy and useful family history. A Victorian advocate of diaries, W.S. Jerome, saw family history as the best use of a diary "Perhaps, some evening when the family are sitting and talking together, someone will ask 'what kind of weather did we have last winter?' or 'when was the picnic you were speaking of?' and the journal is referred to."⁵ This idealised semi-public family record is exactly the kind of document that May sees her diaries to be. Her description of her grandchildren looking through her diaries "I've come home here and found them scattered and I said, 'What are you looking for?' 'We're looking for something,' and, 'approximately what year?' And then I found it," echoes exactly the purpose suggested by Jerome of a diary being, at its core, a small family history.

The diaries that May writes in are all small, 4"x 5" five-year, pre-printed books. Each page includes space for five short entries per date, meaning that one page would contain five consecutive years of entries for that day. The earliest diary covers the dates January 1, 1949 to Dec 31, 1953; there are twelve complete diaries in total, spanning sixty years beginning in 1949 ending in 2008. Occasionally additional information,

⁵ Jane H. Hunter, "Inscribing the Self in the heart of Family: Diaries and Girlhood in Late-Victorian America," *American Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (March 1992), 51-81: 56.

generally events such as birthdays or deaths, are written in the margins or across the top of the diary page.⁶ Half of one diary, 1974 -1978, had been re-written in a new volume to be more legible. The months January to May were rewritten in a new volume, and the older entries that had been copied over were cut out of the original diary. It appears that the new copy was not altered in any meaningful way, other than that being more legible than the original. Several entries in the original diary that were rewritten in the new version are word-for-word, including the extra note “1976 my last shift at the frontier inn” that appears at the top of the page.⁷

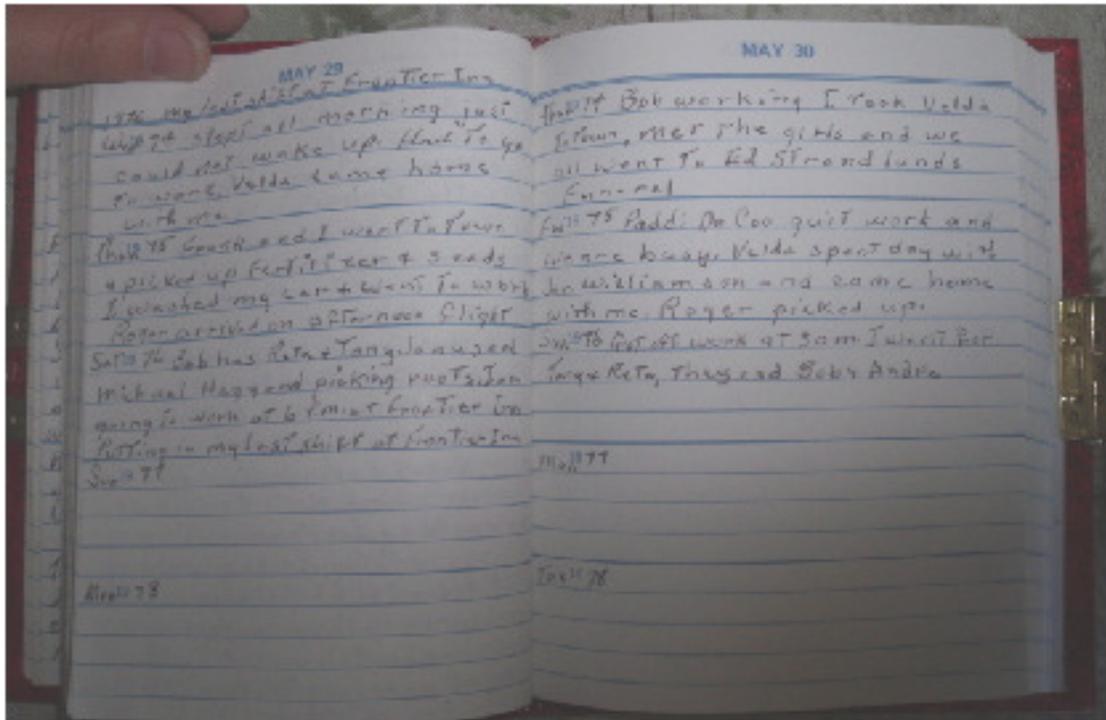


Figure 4.1, Rewritten Diary May 30, 1974-1978

⁶ See: Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2

⁷ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1974-1978" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1974-1978).

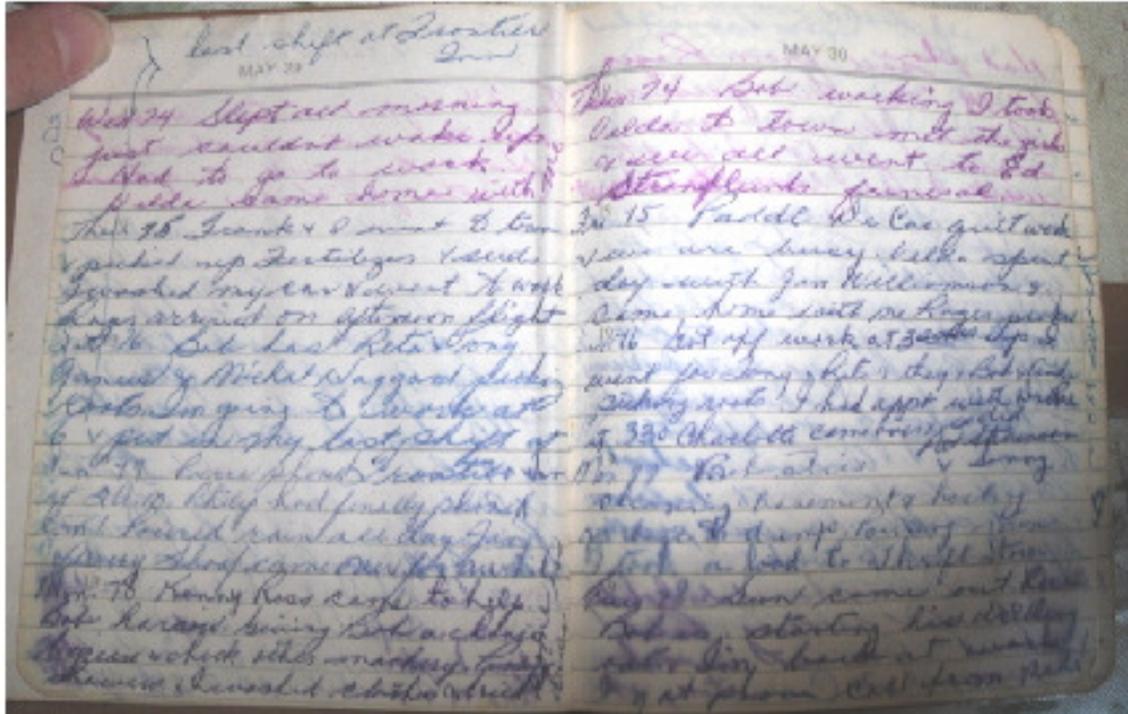


Figure 4.2 Original Diary, May 30, 1974-1978

Because of the standardized format of the diaries, there is little available space to write for each day so diary entries are, by design, brief. Entries are almost entirely event-based with little space for emotional discussions or editorial opinion. The entries follow a similar format, starting with the date, the weather, rides caught, chores accomplished, any visitors, and activities at work or on the farm. An example of one page from the 1949-53 volume is a good example of an average page of entries:

January 19

Wednesday 1949 -40° [-40°C] I did all the chores. Johnny Cushway dropped in Made Roger a pair of pants Did a little knitting feeling groggy & feverish

Thursday 1950 Still mild. Washed clothes by hand. Filled all the lines. Bob and Arthur made 2 trips to Cushways to have grain chopped.

Friday 1951 -40 [-40°C] Bob still has a cold but is up. Bob & I went to do Janitor work. So cold I haven't seen anyone go by to the dance

Saturday 1952 -38 [-38°C] I walked to the store for mail. Caught ride back with George Swagger. Bob got home at 11 PM

Monday 1953 -°5 to -10° [-20°C to -23°C] Bob stayed home to do necessary work I am very sick, vomiting My worst day yet.⁸

The entries are short, and although they are written a year apart, are very similar. The health of the family (Bob has a cold and May is vomiting), rides into town with neighbours George Swagger and Johnny Cushway, trips to get the mail and the communities social activities, going to the dances. The diaries also are written without too much thought towards grammar or punctuation. They are, in a sense, eminently practical. What we don't learn is why or how these events occurred. The comment about May's "worst day yet" and her vomiting are due to a pregnancy, which is almost never noted in the diary, aside from when May went to the doctor and found out she was pregnant, and when twins were born in March.

The diaries often contain important events noted at the top of the page. These events are what May describes as "a lot of good things and a lot of sad things" that are kept in the diaries. The notes at the top include local and family births, arrests, weddings, deaths, accidents, and sometimes world events such as the death of a public figure or a celebrity. For example a week after the above entry on January 28 May notes "Nora [May's sister] had a baby girl Janet May" at the top of the page, while on that day's entry May describes the event in slightly more detail "Wednesday 1953 – 30° [-34°C] Nora had a baby girl at 7:10 AM 6 pounds 12 ½ ounces Snowing I did all chores. Stanley Kemp brought wood by truck."⁹ Although the birth of May's niece and namesake was

⁸ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1949-1953" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1949-1953), Jan 19, 1949-1953.

⁹ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," Jan 28.

announced at the top of the page, in the daily entry it warranted equal footing with the weather and Stanley Kemp delivering wood.

Examining audience and looking at May's diaries as examples of frontier diaries is also helpful for reading the diaries content. Women's pioneer diaries are quite different from the male travel diaries of the 1900s. The original diaries of male explorers, like Thompson and Mackenzie were as much kept for the reason of geography, as sentiment. Mallon points out "if you were exploring someplace nobody else had been to you had better be able to tell your sovereign [or Company in the case of Fraser and Thompson] how you got there."¹⁰ However, later travel journals began to take the shape of an adventure story, as many would not travel to the far North like William Butler, they could travel vicariously through his journals. Although occasionally women's pioneer diaries were annals of wonder and adventure more often they were the complete opposite: "unemotional records of mileage, domestic details, and whether or not there was enough grass along the route for the cattle that particular day."¹¹ Women's frontier diaries, a category within which I would include at least the first ten years of May Barrette's diaries, are a multi functioning tool for the women. They operate as a kind of coping mechanism for the writer. Gayle Davis sees the frontier diary performing five important functions or mediations for the writer. First as a memory aid, a travel diary would be one of the few possessions a woman may possess as a souvenir of the trip. Secondly as a continuation of a former life and practice, since diary writing was one activity that a woman could continue in her new surroundings. It could be a substitute for female

¹⁰ Thomas Mallon, *A Book of One's Own: People and their Diaries* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1984), 42.

¹¹ Mallon, 46.

companionship and old friends. In this manner, diaries served as a kind of empathetic audience for what was a very difficult day-to-day existence. Fourth, it allowed the writer to mediate between feelings of insignificance and of being remembered, the diaries being a physical reminder of the women's presence in this new country.¹² Finally diaries allowed women to maintain a kind of mental strength under difficult circumstances, allowing them to mediate their feelings of fear and estrangement. Although some diarists use this as a vehicle to express their feelings, most women avoided any mention of feelings which, "may well indicate a desire for control, organisation, and continuity in a foreign environment where her former stable routines of life were unknown."¹³

This analysis of frontier diaries is important to keep in mind when looking at May Barrette's diaries, particularly due to the seeming equality of what would seem important and mundane events preserved in the diaries. An excellent example of this appears in the week of March 13 – 17, 1953.

March 13, Friday 1953 17° Above [-8°C]. Roger and I went to mail a letter to Bob. He came to see us Mom slept this afternoon. Marie Ferguson dropped in. Nora came home

March 14, Saturday 1953 5° Above [-15°C] Velda did a huge wash. I am knitting socks for Bob. Mrs. Sands Sr. died at 9.30 Emery's Mother

March 15, Sunday 1953 A lovely day. Mom and Velda went to Gauthiers this afternoon. Little Pet and I had a good sleep.

March 16, Monday 1953 30° [-1°C] Mom working at Sands. I feel thoroughly ill Caught rides with Mr. Quillum at 7 PM. Went to hospital. Had twin boys by 11 PM. Philip Victor 6 ½ lbs Pierre René 6 lbs

¹² Gayle Davis, "Women's frontier diaries: writing for good reason," *Women's Studies* 14 (1987), 6-12.

¹³ Davis, 11.

March 17, Tuesday 1953 35° Above [1°C]. Bob came to see me this a.m. He is in shock! I am feeling much better though very weak. Mom and Velda came to see me this evening. A calf drowned in dugout at home.¹⁴

The birth of May's twins, although shocking to Bob - they were at the time unaware that May was pregnant with multiples - is not built up or narrated at all. May provides no discussion of her condition in the earlier entries, which in the 9th month of pregnancy with twins must have been extremely difficult. The birth of twins is listed alongside feeling ill (presumably from the labour), who she caught a ride into town with, and the death of the calf the following day. The birth event is not built up or narrated at all. Even in the earlier months it is only noted that May is occasionally ill, and when she first finds out about her pregnancy. This lack of context is challenging, as it is a code that May and her family implicitly understand, but as an outsider reading the diaries they are difficult to understand.

French Diary theorist Phillipe LeJeune describes this challenge as *the implicit* noting: "Very few diarists begin with introducing themselves and providing information about their background, milieu, or personality and appearance. For them these things go without saying."¹⁵ According to Susan Jones, the indeterminacy of incidents mentioned in the diaries are best described as an abundance of story, coupled by a lack of contextualization. The event appears to exist in a vacuum, as "what may have been very clear to the diarist because the events were current and parochial and the agents in the events well known to the writer, may provide a site of mystery to the reader a century or

¹⁴ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1949-1953," (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1949-1953).

¹⁵ Philippe Lejeune, "The 'Journal de Jeunesse' in Nineteenth Century France," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff, trans. Martine Breillac, 107-122 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 14.

more later.”¹⁶ It is this implicit background knowledge that is missing in the text and makes May’s diaries difficult to penetrate at times.

Another example of this lack of contextualization is an ongoing issue May has with her brother-in-law Maurice. Maurice moved from Ottawa to live with May and Bob when they first took over May’s father’s farm in 1949. The diaries repeatedly mention issues between Maurice and the family:

October 19 Wednesday 1949 Bob working on his pig house. I’m canning meat & baking bread. Maurice came home & did the words ever fly!

October 25 Tuesday 1949 Bob started putting his engine together. Johnny Cushway came by on way to the store. Maurice came home after “supplying friends” with meat

October 31 Monday 1949 I baked bread & hauling in ice. Bob out in the field. Maurice walked off with a rifle.

November 12 Saturday 1949 Went to hospital for WI Baked a cake. Got kids ready Bob & Maurice had a spat. Maurice went to Halls for the day. We got home late & cold on open sleigh

November 15 Tuesday 1949 Bob rode Tiny South, he piled firewood on baseline Maurice walked off again I scrubbed bedroom Washed my coat. Finished Arthur’s jacket

November 16 Wednesday 1949 Cold, cloudy & windy. We cleaned stovepipes. Later I scrubbed floors while Bob piled wood & sorted slabs Maurice tinkered away the whole day

November 17 Thursday 1949 Mild & sunny No snow. Bob went to pile wood & saw George Schwinger in the bush along baseline Maurice walked off with rifle. I’m busy plastering

November 21 Monday 1949 Maurice walked off after breakfast & came home at supper. Bob & I straightened up woodpile. Bob made pig troughs I baked pies

November 22 Tuesday 1949 Bob went to pile wood Saw Jim Hill Maurice left again apparently getting fence post. Bob using team & wagon. I’m doing some plastering, raining¹⁷

¹⁶ Susan E. Jones, "Reading Leonard Thompson: The Diary of a Nineteenth-Century New Englander," *Atenea* 24, no. 1 (2004), 118-119

The entries, when taken apart, seem quite unremarkable but, it is the repetition of incidents: “Maurice walked off with a rifle,” “Maurice came home after ‘supplying friends’ with meat” seem innocuous, but combined with the October 19th and the November 12th entries they begin to mean something else altogether. The family is not getting along and living together has become difficult. Maurice spends most of his time at the neighbours and May subtly criticises him for “tinkering” or “apparently getting a fence post” when Maurice *is* home. The opinions in the diaries are coded, just under the surface. Emotional language is almost completely absent; instead, it only comes through punctuated statements “did the words ever fly!” that explicitly indicate a problem.

Women’s frontier diaries make a particularly interesting study as they chronicle events and communities as they develop. Several theories about the diaries kept by travellers and emigrants conclude that the diaries are not only a place to set details to be remembered later but as a “coping mechanism through which the women adjusted to the hardships, freedom and challenges to the frontier.”¹⁸ For men in the frontier private diaries also took a civilizing role, taking the place of conversation. According to HBC historian Laura Murray “the act of keeping a personal diary (as opposed to a post journal or account book, the most common fur trade genres) also indicates an affective orientation toward a literate culture, whether the imagined reader be the author or other intimates.”¹⁹ Trader Daniel Harmon’s journal, which was circulated to his family in Vermont, offered short comments on recent or unfolding events, his lack of contact with

¹⁷ Barrette, “Diary: 1949-1953.”

¹⁸ Davis, 5-14.

¹⁹ Laura J. Murray, “Fur Traders in Conversation,” *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 2 (2003), 285-314.

peers, and his relationships at regular intervals, but does not discuss his work at all.

Murray sees this intimate discussion as more like half of a conversation than a personal narrative.²⁰ Written correspondence with family and friends did help the traders cope with isolation but mail was often slow and infrequent. A diary could stand in for day-to-day conversations and provide a more constant companionship.²¹

In contrast to the emotionality expressed in diaries like Harmon's, many of the private diaries of frontier women like May, were decidedly non-intimate, and unemotional, remarking only on the day's events, chores, weather, and visitors. Even events that would inspire emotion, like a death in the family, were dealt with matter-of-factly. Davis sees this, particularly with frontier writers, as a desire for some kind of control or organization over a foreign and potentially hostile environment. "The frontier writer made a shift in focus from the unpredictable and or distressing realities of her life to the factual and organized act of keeping her journal, inventing orderliness where there was none."²² It is interesting to note that May connects starting her diary with leaving Mannville, and her elementary school, and moving to Fort St. John. When I asked her when she started writing diaries she told me it was "When I first started school. There was no school where we moved"²³ May connects her diary writing with her former life in Mannville, particularly to her school life, which to a child, is an example of an orderly and transformed existence.

²⁰ Murray, 292.

²¹ Davis, 9.

²² Davis, 11-12.

²³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

History of the Diary

Diaries can be, and often are, the most personal form of narrative. As a genre, diaries can both infuriate and inform due to their incredibly intimate view of the mundane and wider world. Whether for private consumption, managerial supervision, or public circulation, diaries are written exclusively from a personal viewpoint. As historian John Comaroff says, diaries exist as “undigested fodder for the historical imagination.”²⁴ However, they are not the simple windows to the inner mind that one might assume. Many factors are important when looking at a diary and the reader needs to be aware of the social and societal contexts of the diary including, as archivist Heather Beattie writes, “the individual who created it, her background and social context and her reasons for keeping a diary.”²⁵ Diary theory crosses the disciplines of history and literary theory as they are viewed both as historical accounts and creative nonfiction works of autobiography or life writing. Linguist Irina Paperno sees diaries as historical testimonies, a literary form, and autobiographical documents, and poses the question, given their cross-disciplinarity, what can be done with diaries? She answers that scholars of different disciplines have read, and used diaries as a historical testimony, a literary form, and an autobiographical document.²⁶ Literary critics Suzanne Bunkers and Cynthia Huff see the academic study of diaries as truly transdisciplinary, as a research tool for historians, a repository of information about social structures and relationships for sociologists and a

²⁴ John Comaroff, "Bourgeois biography and colonial historiography [Dedicated to the Late Michael Crowder]," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16, no. 3 (September 1990), 550-559.

²⁵ Heather Beattie, "Where Narratives Meet: Archival Description, Provenance, and Womens Diaries," *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 44, no. 1 (2009), 82-100.

²⁶ Irena Paperno, "What Can be Done With Diaries?," *The Russian Review* 63 (October 2004), 561.

form of literature for rhetoricians and literary scholars.²⁷ The flexibility of the diary makes it a rich source to work with.

The literary forms a diary takes are described as both hybrid and diverse. It is the diarist's commitment and connection to time however that is constant. Diaries can include varying materials, and take on different genres such as a travel narrative, a personal confession, a religious meditation, an autobiography, or a chronicle of personal events.²⁸ The words diary and journal can be and are used interchangeably and the differences between them are a matter of discussion. Mallon posits that the two terms are hopelessly muddled at best. He attempts to tease out the minute differences. Both are "rooted to the ideas of dailiness but perhaps because of *journal's* links to the newspaper trade and *diaries* to *dear*, the latter seems more intimate than the former."²⁹ The words "diary" in English, German "tagebuch" and the French "journal" all are derived from a root meaning "day" and that notwithstanding the diversity of the writing styles, a diary is "committed to the calendar day by day." With that in mind, Paperno defines the diary as: "a text written in the first-person, in separate instalments, ideally on a daily basis, and ostensibly for the purposes of giving an account of the writer's personal experience in a given day, which is not necessarily addressed to someone other than the diarist."³⁰ K. Kuhn-Osius begins talking about diaries by decrying the lack of similarity between different diaries and claiming that it is difficult to say anything that could be the same for

²⁷ Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, "Issues in Studying Women's Diaries: A Theoretical and Critical Introduction," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, 1-22 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 1.

²⁸ Paperno, 562.

²⁹ Mallon, 1.

³⁰ Paperno, 562.

all of them. Unlike other types of documents, diaries are not just described by their content and formal organization but by the circumstances under which they were written. The one unifying similarity he finds is that they are written in “visibly separated instalments corresponding to the time of composition and thus progressing more or less from one day to the next.”³¹ Mallon, Paperno and Kuhn-Osius’ definitions all focus on time, that the diary is a personal document and that it is written or compiled for a variety of purposes, which are sequenced and organized by the date that they were written. Journals share the diary’s temporal sequencing and organization, but are written with a less intimate purpose in mind. The May Barrette Diaries, the Fort St. John Hudson’s Bay Journals and Monica Storrs Diaries all fit into this complex definition. They were all written more or less daily, in the first person, but differ with varying levels of intimacy, narrative clarity and audience. It is this first person narrative; attached to a specific time and place that makes working with diaries so useful to the historian.

Diaries as History

Audience

The question of audience is integral to both historical and literary diary scholarship, although our adolescent view of a diary is as a confessional space, one that comes pre-packaged with a lock and key, has historic roots. The idea of a diary as a private place is of particular interest to diary theorists. Cultural theorist K. Kuhn-Osius argues that the contemporary diary’s lack of a speech act implies that they are not

³¹ K. Eckhard Kuhn-Osius, "Making Loose Ends Meet: Private Journals in a Public Realm," *The German Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (1981), 166.

intended to be an interchange of texts and ideas; this is one of the elements that differentiates diaries from letters or essays. The only audience a diarist addresses in their writing according to Kuhn-Osius, is themselves.³² This, however, is not necessarily true in practice and looking at degrees of audience is a more effective approach in analyzing diaries. Andrew Hassat uses a sliding scale, adapted from Jean Rousset's *Le Journal Intime, texte sans destinataire?* [Diaries, text without a destination?] (1983) to position the diarist in respect to audience.

Rousset's scale (as cited in Hassam) is as follows:

1. Diaries written solely for the diarist (no other reader)
2. Diaries directly addressed to the diarist or an external addressee who will never read the diary (i.e. Anne Frank's Dear Kitty)
3. Diaries addressed to an external addressee who might read the diary
4. Diaries which the diarist allows to be read by an intimate acquaintance (such as a friend or husband)
5. Joint diaries (with more than one author)
6. Diaries addressed and presented to a group of friends
7. Diaries that the diarist allows to be published, either while living or posthumously.³³

The scale of privacy depends on several factors, including the openness of the diarist to being read, the relationship between the diarist and the implied reader and the number of readers the diarist is willing to share the diary with, or the degree to which the author is comfortable with the implied secrecy clause of a diary being violated by an outside audience. The degree that a reader breaks this secrecy clause can be correlated with how incomprehensible the events in the diary may be, as mutual understanding between writer

³² Kuhn-Osius, 166-176.

³³ Andrew Hassam, "Reading Other Peoples Diaries," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Spring 1987), 435-436.

and reader is missing. The level of secrecy then does not affect whether or not the diary could be published, only how it is to be read.³⁴

Awareness of audience and this transition of a diary from a private document to a public one is worthy of some discussion as it impacts the content and voice in the diary. Looking at a private versus public diaries, or in her words comparing “Truly Private Diaries” and “Private Diaries as Public Documents” Lynn Bloom identifies several features of each type of diary. The *Truly Private Diary* (TPD) is described as lists, records of expenditures, the weather, visits to and from neighbours, or public occurrences. They are stylistically terse and seem “coded,” as without outside information the reader would not understand what was going on in the text. People are not identified and events are not contextualized. The form of the TPD has not changed significantly over the years. Each entry involves a date, perhaps a reference to the weather and a few incidents. These diaries involve little or no narrative awareness and no foreshadowing; “the reader must supply whatever integration of theme, subject, and character there is, for the private diarist does not do this.”³⁵ The last element of the TPD is what Bloom calls “characters, central and subordinate.” This, in essence, is the author themselves, or an unedited version of the writer. The reader must assemble their own version of the author, through her telling and attention to particular events. Secondary characters are generally not fleshed out by the writer and are therefore only assembled

³⁴ Hassam, 437.

³⁵ Lynn Z. Bloom, “‘I Write for Myself and Strangers’: Private Diaries as Public Documents,” in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff, 23-37 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 25 -26.

through fragmentary references and events.³⁶ There is immense value in these diaries as historical references, but they lack an autobiographical theme or overriding narrative, which makes them difficult to decode as a reader.

Private Diaries as Public Documents, (PDaPD) are more developed than TPD. They have a wider scope of interest, including both daily occurrences as well as the writer's intellectual and philosophical opinions. As these diaries are much broader in scope and more fully developed, they also have a more varied form, even though they too follow a day-to-day format. The major difference, aside from a more developed subject matter, is the use of overarching stories and other narrative techniques such as foreshadowing, symbolism, metaphor, and characterization. This is the most difficult element of the diary for the outside reader - its repetitiveness, and lack of contextualization. Literary devices help orient the reader within the greater narrative and most often occur when the diary is being rewritten or revised by the diarist.³⁷ This is analogous to the published diarist placing herself as if in a posed portrait while the private writer appears in a casual snapshot. "The writer composed her own character, moves that character to centre stage, becoming the principal actor in her own story."³⁸ There is a more storied focus in a PDaPD and the passage of time gives the writer the ability to reflect on events and provides a sense of narrative drive. The diarist knows where this story is going, something that a diarist that is not revising or revisiting cannot know, as they are only writing in the moment

³⁶ Bloom, 27.

³⁷ Bloom, 29-31.

³⁸ Bloom, 32.

Truly private diaries or those written for only an immediate family audience are the types of diaries a historian will more likely be working with as they are the types of unpublished documents found in an archive. Critical Theorist Cynthia Huff approaches private manuscript diaries with what she describes as empathy, seeing manuscript diaries as a buried cultural tradition, particularly of women writers. Because of the difficulty of participating as a reader in a more fractured, non-narrative environment of the private diary she suggests as researchers we need to “simultaneously realize our limited position and try to thicken our understanding by engaging the inner and outer worlds of the diary.”³⁹ By doing this we can utilize different strategies to help us realize the information in the diaries. It is essential to realize the diaries as “deeply contextualized family centred multimedia discourses” and hence the self that is projected in the diaries as multidimensional, requiring efforts on the historian’s part to help reconstruct the context and content via period histories, census records and other archival materials.⁴⁰ She also points to the diary’s status as “archived” as an indication that they have been relegated to a sub-literary status, important enough to have been stored but historically unworthy of serious study. Published and edited diaries, material with easily identified narrative markers is more accessible. This is the challenge with manuscript diaries since they are handwritten, sometimes all over the page, and are often non-narrative and non-contextualized, as has been previously discussed. We need to read for not only what is included, but also for that which is implicit, for repetition and gaps, and with an awareness of our reading strategies, recognizing that diarists were often the chroniclers of

³⁹ Cynthia A. Huff, "Reading as Re-vision: Approaches to Reading Manuscript Diaries," *Biography* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2000), 506.

⁴⁰ Huff, 508-509.

family events. This allows us to adjust our reading to the particular content found in truly private diaries.⁴¹ It is this chronicling of daily life, the seeming repetition of the mundane or the trivial that puts research closer to lived experience and makes diaries so interesting to the historian, as these elements are chiefly missing in other types of archival material.

The diaries of Louis the XII's doctor Jean Héroard provide excellent example of the information that can be gleaned from the mundane and repetitive, as well as the difficulty an intimate diary presents to both the historian and the reader. A prime example of a non-contextualized private text, Jean Héroard's journals begin with the birth of the Dauphin in 1601, and provide a meticulous and detailed daily diary that chronicle the smallest details of the prince's daily existence. Although mined by many historians due to the intimate knowledge the doctor had of the young prince, the diary has in its entirety been deemed un-publishable. This is not only due to the diary's length, the complete diary took up over 6000 pages, but also because the diary is unreadable on its own, partly due to the doctor's obsession with detailing minutiae - much of the diary was made up of notes on the young prince's diet and bodily functions.⁴² An abridged version, appearing in 1868, was much more popular with readers but, according to many, was inferior as "readability came at a certain cost."⁴³ Susan Jones, in her work with nineteenth century American diaries, echoes this frustration: "a thousand details that seem unimportant enough crowd the text, and sometimes much of what is told seems trivial to the reader."

⁴¹ Huff, 511.

⁴² Elizabeth Wirth Marvick, "Louis the VIII and His Doctor: On the shifting fortunes of Jean Héroard's Journal," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 279-280.

⁴³ Marvick, 284.

However, it's not that the diary itself is trivial, only that there are too many stories to be easily read or understood.⁴⁴

Diaries in Fort St. John

Although written in the same area of the Peace River, Fort St. John, within 50 years of one another, diaries like those kept by Frank Beaton, Monica Storrs, and May Barrette, give very different versions of life in the Peace. This is due to differences in author, style, audience and how the diaries were used to mediate their environments,

Monica Storrs

Monica Storrs was a missionary who arrived from England in The Peace River in 1920 to help establish an Anglican ministry in the area. Her mission was to establish a Sunday school, visit and minister to the local families, and set up and oversee children's activities, particularly the first Girl Guides and Boy Scout troops in the area. Monica came from a deeply religious Victorian family. Her grandfather was Rev. John Storrs (Sr.) a Curate in Halifax and then rector in St. Johns. Her father Rev. John Storrs (Jr.), born in Nova Scotia, was the dean of Rochester in the UK and her younger brother Christopher Storrs became Bishop of Grafton in New South Wales.⁴⁵ She came from a long tradition of missionaries whose work in Western Canada was not just establishing churches and ministering to the residents, but included acting as a personal link to communities back in England. The English parishes that sent these missionaries were

⁴⁴ Susan E. Jones, "Reading Leonard Thompson: The Diary of a Nineteenth-Century New Englander," *Atenea* 24, no. 1 (2004), 120.

⁴⁵ Monica Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931*, ed. W.L Morton (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), xxiv.

prevailed upon to donate money and clothing to the frontier areas of Canada, fulfilling a mission of colonial obligation.⁴⁶ Monica was unmarried, and spent her early life in church service working as the secretary of the Diocese, and eventually became the divisional commander of the Girl Guides. With the death of her mother in 1923 and her father in 1928, Monica entered St. Christopher's College in Blackheath and met Eva Hasell who was instrumental in pointing Monica towards the Peace River as a place in need of ministry.⁴⁷

Four organizations were particularly focused on bringing individuals, and single women of independent means, like Monica, to the Canadian West. Firstly, "the Fellowship of the Maple Leaf" was foundational in bringing young people, particularly those trained at Monica's alma mater St. Christopher's, to Canada to pursue mission work. Second the "Sunday School by Post" was a correspondence-style Sunday school for children in rural areas. Thirdly, but probably most importantly, were the activities of the Fellowship of the West, which was formed to send pairs of missionaries, a Priest and a Layman, into the dioceses of Athabasca and Caledonia to work. They were then to return during the summer to raise funds for the Canadian dioceses.⁴⁸ The last agent, and a direct influence on Monica's decision to come to Canada and particularly the Peace River, was a movement called the Western Canada Sunday School Caravan Fund, run by Monica's contemporaries Eva Hasell and her companion Iris Sayle.

⁴⁶ Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl*, xxv.

⁴⁷ Monica Storrs, *Companions of the Peace: Diaries and Letters of Monica Storrs, 1931-1939*, ed. Vera R. Fast (Toronto: University Of Toronto Press, 1999), 6.

⁴⁸ Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl*, xxxviii.

This unique idea involved Hasell buying a van and visiting children in isolated areas. Hasell and her companion lived, slept and cooked in the van while visiting the parishioners in the locality, helping with established Sunday schools and setting up Sunday schools in areas that did not have one. The van was then donated to the Diocese under the condition that it continued to be used for the same work.⁴⁹ By 1929, when Monica began her move to join the Western Canada Sunday School Caravan in the Peace River, there were twelve vans and 24 “vanners” working under Hassel’s supervision in eight western dioceses. One interesting aspect of the vanners was they were all women, as Hasell saw this as a ministry started by and to be maintained exclusively by women.⁵⁰ Storrs came to the Peace River in 1929, commissioned by Bishop Rix on the urging of Eva Hasell as a unique type of missionary. She was instructed to conduct Sunday school, to foster contact with the local women in the area, and also to minister by conducting church services and funerals in the absence of regular clergy. Storrs described her calling:

Miss Hasell saw me in England, where I was preparing for God’s call. Miss Haskell said, “can you ride? Go to the Peace River in British Columbia – fine country; lots of fine people going in; NO CHURCH; lots of children; lots of mosquitoes –just the place for you, Storrs”⁵¹

Monica also arranged libraries, organized grain operations, distributed clothing, financed various medical interventions, and set up a border system out of her home for local children to attend school.⁵² In the absence of a van, Monica learned to ride a horse for her ministry, earning her the nickname “God’s Galloping Girl.”

⁴⁹ Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 5.

⁵⁰ Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 6.

⁵¹ Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl*, xli.

⁵² Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 11.

The diaries of Monica Storrs no longer exist in their original written form; however, a privately published, typed and bound copy of the diaries, in two volumes, 1929-1930 and 1935-1939, are held in the British Columbia Archives in Victoria and the North Peace Archives in Fort St. John. The 1929-1930 archival version was typed by hand and bound while the 1935-1939 archival volume was typeset and printed by 'The Kings' Stone' Press, in Long Compton, Shipston on Stone, England, and is marked on each page "Not for publication." It was from these that the edited versions of the published diaries, *God's Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931*, edited by W.L Morton and *Companions of the Peace: Diaries and Letters of Monica Storrs, 1931-1939*, edited by Vera R. Fast, were taken. The diary entries themselves are quite long and detailed. For example her entry for the week of April 12th 1930 begins: "there will be almost nothing to say about last week, partly because nothing happened, and partly because I've got a toothache which has swallowed up my memory."⁵³ Her entry for this week of "almost nothing to say" totalled over 700 words. There she discussed her attempts to teach the Passion to a Sunday school group in Taylor Flats, and a scout meeting that was interrupted when one of the boys had to go back home to kill a pig. She describes two of her scout troop with detailed and evocative descriptions:

Cecil (pronounced out here Seasill!), Canadian with enough Indian blood to give him coal black hair and eyes. A delightful looking boy, full of talk, not the least shy, most attractive and quite unreliable.

Hughie aged 12. A darling little fair-haired boy who might have come from an English slum (Yorkshire for preference.) He has no mother and his father is in

⁵³ Storrs, "Monica Storrs' Diary 1929-1930" (Fort St. John, BC: North Peace Museum and Archives, 1930), 30-31.

prison (the bootlegger) and he is the most delightful little boy in the school; desperately eager, full of fun and completely unself-conscious”⁵⁴

Unlike other diarists, it seemed that Storrs wrote in her diaries weekly, rather than daily.

She notes, “I am trying to keep Monday as a Sabbath i.e. wear a skirt all day, do no visiting, but do washing and mending and other home chores.”⁵⁵ Ostensibly this Sabbath was also the day she wrote in her diary.

There are several differences between the published and unpublished diaries. When writing about local people Storrs uses a convention of referring to individuals by their last initial i.e. the S, Mrs. B. or Cecil A., and the edited versions, particularly in *God's Galloping Girl*, have gone to great lengths to identify the people mentioned. The second difference is in length, which is more a factor in *The Companions of the Peace* which features only fragments of the journals and letters written by Storrs.⁵⁶

Monica's Storrs' diaries present an interesting paradox. Her diaries could be considered a frontier diary, as Monica was an English gentlewoman thrown into a very frontier society. However, Monica's diaries are emotional, lively, extensive, and very much aware of construction of self as well as audience. Storrs discusses her place as an outsider and a woman in Fort. St John:

It is this objectionable quality of Englishness which in this tiny community of Americans or born Westerners is so unpardonable. It is a difficult quality to shake off or grow out of it and what's more – who in their senses would want to grow out of it? It's all rather a puzzle to me.... The funny thing is although Brother Wolf is just as English as we are, it doesn't go against him so much. Partly I think because he is a man...⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Storrs, "Diary 1929-1930", 31.

⁵⁵ Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl*, 17.

⁵⁶ Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 24.

⁵⁷ Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 65-66.

She spends a great deal of time contextualizing her entries so the reader can navigate them with ease. This is quite different from Gayle Davis' previously discussed work on frontier diaries. This difference can, however be attributed to the fact that the diaries Davis was working with were truly private diaries while Storrs' diaries were widely read and written for a specific audience. The diaries were circulated back in England as part of Monica's ministry and fund raising efforts for the people in Fort St. John. Storrs frequently mentions the needs of the community, directly addressing the readers in England: "you will see again why the main problem is clothes... I really can't think of what would have happened here this winter without the magnificent supply from home."⁵⁸ By describing the community's need through stories of her work with the residents of Fort St. John and describing the outcomes of the charity of the people back in England, Storrs entertains, reports and creates a conversation with the people back home. When writing about her own journaling and the subjects she chooses to discuss, again Storrs is thinking about the audience and their reaction to her recorded daily life. She notes, "this diary is so fearfully self-centred that I'm sure you must think us utterly parochial and absorbed in our own absurd little narrow life with no consciousness of the world outside, but I can only just achieve the time and energy to record our own little tedious adventures which will certainly never be recorded anywhere else."⁵⁹ This hearkens to a diary's, and by extension the reader's, usefulness as an "empathetic audience."

⁵⁸ Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 100.

⁵⁹ Monica Storrs, *Companions of the Peace*, 66).

Storrs' particular penchant for employing a diary as a meditative tool, has deep roots in Victorian devotional behaviour, particularly the spirituality of a protestant woman. Historian Jane Hunter writes that for upper class Victorian girls, much of their lives were lived through both reading and producing the written word.⁶⁰ Diaries were often used in nineteenth-century middle-class homes as a tool for developing morals, character, and refinement in girls. As moral character became an everyday concern "diaries assumed new importance as regulators and also demonstrations of sustained virtue."⁶¹ Along with discipline, fasting, prayer meetings, meditation and self-examination diary writing was a means, "by which the godly self was maintained, indeed constructed, through the act of writing."⁶² As a member of a deeply Anglican family the act of diary writing would have been encouraged, if not expected practice, for a devoutly religious woman like Monica Storrs.

Frank Beaton and the Hudson's Bay Company Journals

In the case of historic chartered companies, like the Hudson's Bay and the Dutch East India Company, control of overseas managers was a particular problem. The cost of supervision when companies were operating at such substantial distances was a major problem so companies developed a "system of monitoring and internal controls."⁶³ One

⁶⁰ Jane H. Hunter, 52.

⁶¹ Hunter, 54.

⁶² Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality," *The Historical Journal* 39, no. 1 (1996), 33-56.

⁶³ Ann M. Carlos and Stephen Nicholas, "Agency Problems in Early Chartered Companies: The Case of the Hudson's Bay Company," *The Journal of Economic History* 50, no. 4 (1990), 865

of the methods that the Hudson's Bay Company established in 1671 was the ongoing use of journals and account books.

The Hudson's Bay office in London:

Ordered that Mr. [Thomas] Rastel doe forthwith give an account to this Committee not only of the whole charge of Setting out the Shippes & Stocks of the Adventurers this last voyage to Hudson's Bay, but also of the charge of all former Voyages beginneing from the first joynte Stocke of the Adventurers, & that there bee a true state of the Whole business & every particular man's interest duely sett forth & entered in fayre Vellum bookes against tuesday next the 14th day of this instante November, if it can bee Soc Soone done.⁶⁴

These "vellum bookes" became the account books and fort journals that any researcher familiar with the Hudson's Bay Archives knows intimately. They are a fount of information about life in a fur trade fort, but as a business practice, the account books and fort journals were an instrument through which the Hudson's Bay Company could exert control over their managers. The style of and information contained in the account books was heavily standardized and precisely regulated as the company wanted to ensure that they had the most complete records available with which to evaluate their managers and the trading returns.⁶⁵ The clerks who wrote in the journals were sworn to secrecy and access to the journals themselves was tightly controlled. This secrecy was not to cover up improper behaviour, but rather to control trading secrets.⁶⁶

This being the case, a Hudson's Bay journal would have more in common with a private diary than a public one; readership and contributors were highly controlled and the information included was tightly regulated. Frank Beatton wrote many of the journals

⁶⁴ Diedre Simmons, "' . . . If It Can Bee Soe Sonne Done' Annals of the Fur Trade: The Making of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives," *Beaver* 74, no. 3 (June/July 1994): 4.

⁶⁵ Carlos and Nicholas, 869.

⁶⁶ Diedre Simmons, *Keepers of the record: The History of the Hudson's Bay Company Archives* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 2007) 28-30.

at Fort St. John. Beatton, an Orkney Scott, had begun working for the Hudson's Bay Company at Lesser Slave Lake in 1883 and moved to Trout Lake and settled in Fort St. John in 1900 where he worked as clerk in charge for the next twenty-seven years; he was the driving force of the fur trade in the area.⁶⁷ Like the everyday elements listed in truly private diaries, the fort journals focus on everyday events, comings and goings of people, and general business at the fort. Written by Beatton in October 1905, the Fort St. John journal is a snapshot of daily events at the fort. They, like a private diary are non-narrative, and abbreviated in description.

[October]2^[nd]. ... a miner passed[sic] down from Ft G [Fort George, now Prince George]

3^[rd]. Self busy at odd jobs Jokese at firewood the Police left for Fort Grahame this morning

4^[th] Self working at New building ... some indians arieved [sic] Roberts arieved from LSL [Lesser Slave Lake]

7^[th]. ... a canoe arieved [sic] from P.R.L. [Peace River Landing] With Descherlais Brother & Samson

9^[th]. ... Bredins [Brendin and Cornwall] boat arieveds[sic] from P.R.L. and brought the August mail

11^[th]. More indians[sic] arieved [sic] busy as yesterday (with Indians ed) 2 indians arieved [sic] from H[udsons] Hope

12^[th]. Busy at new building. Hired Samson for the winter at \$40.00 per month a small boat arieved [sic] from PRL with Dr. Donald of the NWW Police.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Hudson's Bay Company Archives, "Beatton, Francis Worth (1865–1945) (fl. 1883–1927)," *Hudson's Bay Company Archives: Biographical Sheets*, May 2000, http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/b/beatton_francis.pdf (accessed January 15, 2010).

⁶⁸ Hudson's Bay Company Archives, "Fort St. John Journal 1900-1908," *Peace River Country Research Project Collection*, Margaret Loggie and Isabel Loggie (Calgary, Alberta: Glenbow Archives, 1955-1956).

The October 1905 journals focus on everyday occurrences such as: weather, events (people coming and going), staffing (the hiring of Samson), relations with the local Aboriginal peoples and the ever-important arrival of the mail. The only narrative role Beatton takes is a reference to his role as “Self” and his participation as an employee “busy at odd jobs” in the fort. *The Fort St. John Journals* are, by design, a list of daily events, listed without narration or characterization created for a very particular and specific audience.

The three different diarists, May Barrette, Monica Storrs and Frank Beatton, share similarities and differences in the context of their gender and sense of community. May Barrette and Monica Storrs diaries are very different in narrative voice. May’s diaries are written for a private, familial audience. Her voice is almost missing from the events in the diaries. Monica’s stories are storied and narrative driven, written purposely for a paying audience back in England. However, they both share a focus on the women in their community and attempt to tell the women’s stories. Monica’s ministry was targeted almost exclusively for the women in Fort St. John, one of the major reasons that the Eva Haskell demanded that her vanners were women. May is also interested in the domestic life of woman. Her diaries feature everyday events such as cleaning, laundry and the day-to-day care of her family. May and Monica both write about their domestic spheres, however there is a difference in distance, Monica is consciously aware of her colonial “Englishness” while May is an intrinsic member of her community. Monica is always positioned at a distance from the community she ministered to, while May speaks in a more communal voice.

Although differing in content, May's focus was on her domestic life and Frank Beatton's on the business of running a Fur Trade post; their diaries share a sense of belonging to their community in the Peace River. This first-person plural nature of aboriginal diary writing encourages both diarists to represent the events in their community, Beatton, by writing about the coming and going of the traders and May writing about the comings and goings of her neighbours. Hertha Sweet Wong notes that similarly to people who work with the land such as farmers or fur traders who live "closely with the seasonal cycles and [rely] on a network of reciprocal obligations for survival" have a more communal connection. Writing about oneself, calling attention to one individual's accomplishments diminishes the communal view.⁶⁹ Both May and Frank Beatton are members of mixed indigenous families. May, by being Métis and Frank Beatton, both by working amongst indigenous peoples in the fur trade, and through his marriage to Métis Emma Shaw. Their diaries are similar in their absence of a central narrator, and their focus on the outside events.

Diaries are defined by their form, their function, and their audience and it is by identifying these that a historian can approach the disparate types of information found in the diaries of May Barrette, Frank Beatton, and Monica Storrs. Diaries transverse historical, literary, and critical studies and typifies the microhistorical search for lived experience. It is by looking at elements such as narrator, and intended audience that allow the reader to anticipate the information available in the document.

⁶⁹ Sweet Wong, 169.

Chapter 5: May Whitford

Yeah, well, my dad said, "I want you to be an expert shot." I've been shooting as long as I can remember. Yeah. And he said, "Because the white man has no respect for aboriginal girls or Métis girls. There's no respect there, only abuse." So he said, "You've got to defend yourself." So it worked.

May Barrette

As an exceptional-typical microhistorical subject May Barrette's story needs to not only be significant on its own, but as an example of the history of a wider community. In her chapter on Aboriginal autobiography Hertha Sweet Wong identifies one major factor in these women's autobiographies that differs from western women's biographies. Positioned against men's independently focussed autobiographies, women's autobiographies are posited as relational; the same positioning of individual/ relational appears when white women's autobiography is positioned beside aboriginal autobiography. However, Sweet Wong sees Aboriginal autobiographies not so much as doubly relational as aware of a connection not just to family but also to a wider community. She notes that: "theorists of Native relationality tend to discuss relational subjectivity as associated with cultural grounding and as linked to family, community and expansive kinship networks."¹ Microhistory concentrates on one individual's life in order to reveal the fundamental experiences of ordinary people; May's position as an Aboriginal autobiographer allows her stories and diaries to transcend her own life and to speak to the lives of the women in her wider community. May's stories, in particular those she tells in oral form, are meant to educate and inform her audience. The stories

¹ Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Autobiography," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 168-178 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 168.

about her life growing up as a pioneer in the then remote Peace River Valley and the lives of the other women in her stories are connected. Rather than being doubly disenfranchised, May's life story functions as a connection between women's history and the individual people who have lived it.

The Early Years 1930-1940

May Emma Whitford was born at home on the 27th of April, 1921 at Lake Liza, Alberta, to parents Joseph Whitford and Marguerite Bruneau (also known as Margaret Bruno).² She was the eldest child of Joe and Marguerite and the second eldest of nine siblings: Mary, May's half sister was born in 1912, Phillip was born in 1922 and died in 1927, Velda was born in 1924, Nora in 1927, Cecil was born in 1930 and died in 1954, Floyd was born in 1933 and died in 1972, Tommy was born in 1935 and died in 1977, Ruby Dora (known as Lil) in 1937 and died in 1973 and Agnes Josephine was born in 1938.³

Joe Whitford and Marguerite Bruneau

Joe Whitford was born somewhere between 1896 and 1898 in the state of Montana. There seems to be some confusion over his exact date and place of birth. His World War I enlistment papers give his date of birth as October 13, 1898 and his birthplace as Flathead Valley, Montana.⁴ His death registration lists October 16, 1896 and

² Province of Alberta, "Whitford, May Birth Certificate" (Edmonton, Alberta: Government of Alberta Department of Vital Statistics, May 7, 1933).

³ See Appendix V: May Barrette Family Tree.

⁴ Government of Canada, "Whitford, Joseph," *Particulars of Family of an Officer or Man Enlisted in C.E.F* (National Archives of Canada, March 1918, 9); Government of Canada,

Butte, Montana as his place of birth, while a third document, Joe Whitford's application for Legion Membership, lists his birthplace as "Shoto Montana"[sic.] (likely Choteau, Montana).⁵ Butte and Choteau both border the historic Flathead Valley; Choteau is just east of the valley and Butte at the Southern tip of what is now Glacier National Park in Montana. His marriage registration, issued on the 17th June 1920 lists his age as 23, which would put his birth year as 1896. In rating the veracity of the differing documents the strongest argument for Choteau being his place of birth would be that the documents (the enlistment papers, legion documents and the wedding registration) that were filled out by Joe himself (both of the military documents bear his signature). The death registration, which was filled out by his daughter, May's sister Velda, is less likely to be accurate. The birth year confusion may be the result of Joe not actually knowing his actual birth date, or by a mistake in the military paperwork. May notes that:

That's what Velda said but you see, I didn't look after Dad's grave and usually when I look after a grave, I write on there when they were born and where. And then where they died-- when they died and where. But my sister didn't. He must have been born somewhere because he died. But there's no record of when he was born.⁶

May's account in a local history book gives his place of birth as Choteau and his date of birth as around 1897, the exact date being simply unknown.

In the Cecil Lake history book, *A Community Tells its Story* (2002,) May gives an account of her father's family: "He was part British and part Salteaux (First Nations). His

"Whitford, Joseph," *Particulars of Recruit: Drafted Under Military Service Act, 1917* (Vermillion, Alberta: National Archives of Canada, Dec 3, 1917).

⁵ Province of Alberta, "Whitford, Joseph," *Registration of Death* (Edmonton, Alberta: Archives of Alberta, August 11, 1949); Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League, "Whitford, Joseph: Application For Membership" (May Barrette Private Papers).

⁶ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 23, 2009).

father Phillip Whitford, and his [father's] two brothers came north to be part of the Riel Rebellion in 1885. Phillip brought his family and settled in Canada.”⁷ The Riel Rebellion mentioned here, also known as the North West Rebellion or the Northwest Resistance, is the second of two insurrections that occurred in the late 1800s in Canada and were foundational events for the Métis and the history of Canada. May tells the story of the rebellion and her family:

You see, the history of the Métis is they moved from Eastern Canada to Winnipeg area. Yeah, Red River. And then they got moved from there to Batoche and--and the river flows like that and the land is long and they surveyed their own land and they had this-- and then their houses were close to the river, not too far from the river. This was mostly horse pasture, cow pasture, whatever, and every farmer had access to the river. And then the government ignored their surveying. They just come along and resurveyed. They push them pretty well out of there, well, that's what they were doing. That's what brought the Riel rebellion. So Macdonald had a personal vengeance against Louis Riel. He resented the fact that Louis had a good education. -- Yeah. So and then Dumont went to Montana to get soldiers to sign up for resistance. And that's when my grandfather and two of his brothers went and they were in Batoche. -- Yeah. And my grandfather was injured but he survived. He was a fiddler. He played the fiddle and he won prizes all over the country. But anyway, and then I just remember one uncle, great uncle, you know, my grandfather's brother. Met him once. And the thing that I remember about him, he had two identical black horses and a democrat [a light four-wheeled cart]. All of-- and that was a good team and beautiful horses. He came to the camp we were at to say hello to his family and then he went back to Montana. That's my dad's family.⁸

In 1869, The Hudson's Bay Company had sold Rupert's Land to the Government of Canada for £300,000 and the government set out to settle its new lands without provisions to the Métis communities that had formed there. However, even before the land transfer was official, surveyors were sent out to the Red River. This concerned the inhabitants of the area as many of the local Métis did not have clear title to their land and

⁷ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, *A Community Tells Its Story: Cecil Lake 1925-2000*, ed. Louise Framst (Cecil Lake, BC: Louise Framst Books, 2000), 274.

⁸ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (August 4, 2009).

they had not been consulted in how the land was being surveyed. In the Red River, land was traditionally surveyed in the Quebec seigniorial system of long lots laid out along a waterway, while the English preferred a township system of square lots.⁹ The men of the Red River, including Louis Riel, disrupted the survey party and told the authorities that the new Governor William McDougall would not be admitted in the Red River until he negotiated the terms of settlement with the newly elected Métis National Committee, which was established to protect Métis interests in the area. McDougall's call to arms did not go well when his men were turned back by Ambrose Lépine's Métis troops and Riel led the forces occupying Fort Garry. The Métis then formed a provisional government who drafted a list of Rights for the Métis that demanded recognition of the Red River's unique political status, language, and land. The Métis saw themselves as the people who owned the Northwest Territories as an inherent right, a result of their unique heritage.¹⁰

This unhappiness with the Canadian government rose up again when, in 1878, a petition was sent to the government asking that the land in what is now central and northern Saskatchewan occupied by Métis people be surveyed and title granted. Surveyors were sent out to survey the land but, as with what took place in the Red River, again land was allotted into square sections, rather than the seigneurial style riverfront lots. Gabriel Dumont later recalled:

During 1882 or 1883 we were greatly occupied with this issue... we petitioned the government but never got an answer. The last meeting in this period was held at the home of my father, Isadore Dumont. He had become discouraged, and only wanted to know how we could quickly and easily obtain our rights. An English

⁹ John Weinstein, *Quiet Revolution West: The Rebirth Of Métis Nationalism* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2007), 8.

¹⁰ Louis Riel, "Louis Riel's Last Memoir," in *Hold High Your Heads (History of the Metis Nation in Western Canada.)*, trans. E Maguet (Manitoba: Pemmican Publications, 1982), 2.

Métis named Andrew Spence answered, “there is only one man who can help us now: Riel”... It was quickly decided to bring Riel back to the Saskatchewan to help us draw up petitions, and use his contacts and abilities.¹¹

Gabriel Dumont then travelled to Montana to urge Riel, now an outcast from Canada and a new American citizen, to rejoin the Métis who were fighting for their rights in Saskatchewan.¹² This insurrection, unlike the one in Manitoba, did not succeed and ended with Dumont’s escape to the US and Riel’s surrender and subsequent conviction of treason.¹³ The two rebellions resulted in a series of Half-Breed Scrip Commissions; (a government initiative that was set up to address Métis land claims in the prairies).¹⁴ The trip by Dumont, accompanied by Michel Dumas, Moise Ouellet, and James Isbister to convince Riel to accompany them also convinced other Métis living in Montana to join in the fight. It was this trip by Dumont that brought Joseph Whitford’s family up to Canada whereafter Joseph’s father eventually settled in Northern Alberta. It is unclear what role May’s uncles and grandfather actually played in the insurrection as their names do not appear in Phillipe Garnot’s list; this list of men was included in a letter to Bishop Taché by Garnot who was seeking aid in finding legal representation for their collective involvement in the 1885 Rebellion.¹⁵ However, this does not preclude their participation

¹¹ Gabriel Dumont, *Gabriel Dumont Speaks*, trans. Michael Barnholden (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1993), 40.

¹² Lauren L. Basson, "Savage Half Breed, French Canadian or White US Citizen? Louis Riel and US Perceptions of Nation and Civilization," *National Identities* 7, no. 4 (2005), 372-373.

¹³ Gabriel Dumont, "Gabriel Dumont’s Account of the Northwest Rebellion," in *The Other Natives: the-les Métis, Vol. 1.*, ed. Antione S. Lussier and D. Bruce Sealy, trans. George F. G. Stanley, 249-268 (Winnipeg: Manitoba Métis Federation Press, 1949), 268.

¹⁴ Ken Hatt, "The Northwest Scrip Commissions as Federal policy--some initial findings," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 3, no. 1 (1983), 121.

¹⁵ Lawrence J. Barkwell, *Batoche 1885: The militia of the Métis Liberation Movement* (Winnipeg: Manitoba Metis Federation, 2005), 43.

as the list seems to only include local men who had resided in the Batoche, Duck Lake, and St. Louis areas, which would exclude the men who came up from Montana.¹⁶

Joseph's life changed dramatically with another military engagement; very different from the ones his Grandfather and Uncles had fought against the Canadian Government. This one asked Joseph to fight for Canada and the British Empire in World War I. He enlisted in 1917 as a private and served in England in the 21st Battalion and France in the 50th Battalion. Joe's ability as a hunter was exploited in his military service and he was employed as a sniper. May mentions, "Dad, of course, was a sniper in World War I, badly shot up and he-- I guess he did his own shooting, too."¹⁷ The war affected Joseph severely and left him with lifelong injuries both mental and physical:

Bob Her dad was a war veteran. He had a shoulder injury but when he was hunting, he was able to hold--¹⁸

May: Just long enough to pull the trigger.

Bob: -- the rifle just long enough to-- aim at the right shot and then pull the trigger.

May: He shook all the time.

Bob: His hands--

May: Um-hum.

Bob: -- shook like this.

Me: Oh, wow. But he was still a good shot.

Bob: Oh, yeah.

¹⁶ Barkwell, 43-46.

¹⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

¹⁸ During all the interviews with May, Bob was also in attendance. Although most of the conversation was with May, his contributions have been left intact in this thesis as well as in my transcriptions.

May: Yeah. In fact, when that Johnson up North-- they called him the mad trapper, he was not mad. He outfoxed the police all the time. But anyway, the police came to get Dad to come and help them capture him. And Dad said, 'Do I have to shoot anybody?' And, 'Yes,' they said, 'if it's the only way we can get him, we gotta get him.' And, 'I don't-- do I have to go?' he said. And they said, "No. No, you-- we can't make you go." And he said, 'Well, I've killed enough people in my lifetime.' So he didn't go.¹⁹

Joe was renowned and valued in the remote community for his shooting and trapping abilities. The ability to hunt meant that a family would be able to survive in the remote settlements like Fort St. John. May describes her father's role in the early Cecil Lake community:

And then, of course, being an expert shot and having a trap line he ended up supplying meat for anybody. I remember one lady where Dad took her a hindquarter of a moose. She cried she was so thankful. And she made her own cheese, everybody made their own cheese because they had a cow to milk or something. And anyway, this-- when my dad died there was an article in the paper, this teacher wrote how thankful they were when they saw Mr. Whitford driving into the yard because now they could eat some meat, you know. [laughs] She said, "We made a sandwich with the cheese and then this roast moose meat in between," and then the cheese, they used cheese as bread. They couldn't afford flour.²⁰

The newspaper article mentioned may be the same as the one that appeared in the Alaska Highway News on Thursday Sept 1, 1949 which read:

Our deepest Sympathy to the members of the Whitford family ... His passing brings back memories of when they all lived in this district and Joe's hunting ability and skill with a rifle was so well known... different ones can recall how, for the "hungry 30's," having had no luck hunting, they would only have to go out with Joe Whitford to come back with meat.²¹

¹⁹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

²⁰ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

²¹ Alaska Highway News, "Cecil Lake News Briefs," *Alaska Highway News*, September 1, 1949.

Joe's pension from the war was the family's main means of support during the depression; at \$48 dollars a month, it was a living wage - something many of the neighbours did not have. May and Bob explain the cost of living at the time:

May: And-- but butter was 25 cents a pound and flour was \$2.50, yeah, for flour. You could buy lots.

Bob: A hundred pounds.

Me: A hundred pounds [of flour]? \$2.50. So you could live on that pension.

May: On \$48 a month, yeah.²²

Despite the fact that Joe Whitford's hunting ability and military pension made him indispensable to his family and his community, he was difficult to live with. In a story where May talks about a serious argument between herself and her father, the fight escalated to May being beaten and to her decision to leave home:

So I was mad. And I have a temper. So I said to Mother, "I have a choice, Mom. Either I kill him or leave home." She said, "I think you best leave, because," she said, "we'd starve to death without that cheque."²³

May didn't return to the house until five years later to intervene with her father and mother over the birth of her youngest sister Agnes in 1948. Marguerite was then in her late 40s, on her 10th pregnancy, and the family was understandably concerned about her safety. May's sister had written that they were worried about her mother surviving the labour and that their father was simply not allowing their mother to go to the hospital to have the baby:

Velda wrote in her letter that, "You're the only one I know that will fight with Dad and win. So," she said, "you better come home." So for Mother of course I'd come home. So I came home. I walked in the door and Dad said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "Mother's going to the hospital." I said, "She's going to have that baby in the hospital." He looked at me, "Said who?" I said, "I say so and if

²² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

²³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

you won't let her, I'm going to call the cops." I said to him, "So she better go." She went. It was the last one of all the children to be born in the hospital. But she survived. She wouldn't have made it otherwise. Her muscles were all gone.²⁴

May's closeness to her mother and resentment towards her father runs deep, even when discussing their families, "Oh, my dad ran her family down all the time ...-- her family was so much better family, her family was a family, whereas his is out wandering, you know."²⁵

May's mother Marguerite (also known as Margaret) Bruneau was born in Saint-Paul des Métis in 1900. Her family, like Joseph's, had been displaced after the 1869 and 1885 rebellions. May describes the migration of her mother's family:

There was, I think, about seven girls and about seven boys in the family and they moved from-- my grandmother was 21 years old when she was living in Duck Lake in Saskatchewan. And that's close to Batoche. -- And anyway, her husband got killed. -- At Batoche. And so when the migration took place, see they migrated from the Red River to Batoche, then they had to move from Batoche to-- West again and a lot of them went to Cold Lake.²⁶

May's maternal grandfather Louis Bruneau had deep roots in the Batoche area and was the cousin of Gabriel Dumont, who was directly responsible for the ongoing displacement and movement west of the Métis, including both of May's grandparents.

The ongoing movement west was one of a *long durée*, initially spurred by the NWC and HBC's westward expansion in to the new Athabasca and Columbia districts, in search of new trading opportunities. Like the men in Nicole St. Onge's study of the early voyageurs who migrated west with the fur trade, these men saw the Athabasca region as a new opportunity to work and as a place to raise families. The movement westward was

²⁴ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

²⁵ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 24, 2009).

²⁶ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

precipitated by “a limited capacity to save, lack of a future in Lower Canada, and perhaps their greater sense of responsibility for their native families.”²⁷ May’s family was no exception.

Me: So your mom’s family trapped and hunted and lived-- went from sort of Red River to--

May: Batoche.

Me: Batoche to--

May: And then from Batoche to Cold Lake, that area.

Me: So always moving.

May: Yes. Following the buffalo and the wild game.

The Buffalo hunt was one of the most important events for the Métis on the prairies. It emerged through the engagement of the mixed blood freemen who were no longer indentured to the HBC or the NWC and had begun living permanently on the prairies: “Mutual dependence tied the trader and the freeman hunter. Thus the households of the freemen proved admirably suited to fill the provisioning niche in the western fur trade...”²⁸ The buffalo hunts were a way to produce the massive amounts of pemmican needed to sustain the fur trade and became a symbol of the emergence of Métis dominance on the prairies. However the hunt was too successful, and the Métis needed to follow the dwindling herds. Norbert Welsh, a former Métis trader and buffalo hunter living in Fort Qu’Appelle on the Prairies, recalls: “I didn’t go out that winter [1877-1878] there was no use. There was only a small drove to be seen here and there on the plains.

²⁷ Nicole St. Onge, "Early Forefathers to the Athabasca Métis: Long Term North West Company Employees," in *The Long Journey of a Forgotten People: Métis Identities and Family Histories*, 109-162 (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007).

²⁸ John E. Foster, "The Plains Metis," in *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience*, ed. R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, 375-404 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2004), 382, 387-389.

But I was busy. I had lots of goods and did a lot of trading. I cut and drew rails too, that winter.”²⁹ As the hunting decimated the buffalo, the hunters had to either change occupations, like Welsh, or continue to move west to fulfil their provisionary roles and follow the now dwindling game that families had depended on for their livelihood and food.

Marguerite was raised in a Cree speaking household in and around Cold Lake, Alberta. The only school in the area had burned down, and Marguerite only attended one week of school during her lifetime. She was, as a result, illiterate and depended on her husband and children to help her. On Feb 28, 1967, May writes: “Andre and I drove into town and took mother around on her business.”³⁰ May often mentions running errands with her mother at the end of the month, which goes farther than simply driving, or providing company as her mother needed her children to read for her:

May: Um-hum, so she couldn’t read and then you had to help her with her banks and-- everything. And she knew who to trust out of the kids because she said, “It’s funny when you take me,” she said, “when you take me to do my business, I still have money to come home with. And Velda takes me, I have nothing left.” But there’s a-- I don’t care how many children you have eh? every one is different, um-hum.

Me: So your mom didn’t read or write.

May: No, and then I’d take her shopping and say something is 2.99. And this-- the saleslady said, “That’s 2.99, Mrs. Whitford.” I said, “That’s \$3.00, Mom.” She said, “I said, 2.99.” I said, “I say, 3. What’s she going to buy with the change? You know? Tell me. What can she buy?” So it’s \$3.00, um-hum. It’s hard for people that don’t know how to read or write. -- Yeah, but she was smart. Yeah, if she could read-- boy, I’m sure things

²⁹ Norbert Welsh, *The Last Buffalo Hunter*, ed. Mary Weekes (Altonia, Manitoba: Friesens, 1994).

³⁰ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1964-1968" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1964-1968).

would have been different.³¹

Despite this lack of education, May's mother was functionally, although not elegantly, multilingual. May explains, "Mother spoke three languages and-- all butchered. She spoke French, Cree and English, you know. And she could understand all those languages but she couldn't talk it very well."³²

May and her siblings were also raised speaking Cree, and it was their primary language until they started school. I asked May if she still spoke Cree and she told me a story to illustrate how she still used and understood her first language:

I understand it; I don't speak it. -- No. But I can pick it up if I stop and think. There was a little boy at the grocery store and this man-- there's two men that were standing-- just a little ways away from the checkout. And his wife was going through the checkout and this little boy was, "I said I want this," he was, you know, one of those kind of kids, eh. And-- upsetting everybody. So I said to her, "What is the matter with this big mouth?" I said in Cree. She just about fainted to hear me talking, you know. I said, "This big mouth is upsetting everybody." And so [I] said, "You go to your Dad and you," she said, "get your kid out of here." And they speak fluent Cree up there at the Doig³³ and-- so-- but, oh, I'll never forget her. She was so shocked.³⁴

Although May still has some of her first language, and Bob was raised speaking French, they raised their children only in English.

Although Joseph knew who she was, Marguerite and Joseph did not officially meet until after he had returned from the war. They married despite the wishes of her parents, who didn't approve of the match.

Yeah. But he was working on the Athabasca River as a freighter when-- for-- World War I broke out. He was 17 at the time. He lied and got into the Army.

³¹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

³² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

³³ The Doig is a large First Nations Reserve at *Hanáś Saahgé* [Doig River] located 70 KM North East of Fort. St John and is home of the Doig River First Nation.

³⁴ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

And then he was-- went overseas. And he had seen Mother. He had not met her before he left. But he never forgot her. So when the war was over, he came back to Canada and he looked her up. And my grandmother didn't approve of that soldier. Anyway, she talked until she was blue in the face, didn't do any good. So Mother married him.³⁵

They were married in the Catholic Church in St. Paul Des Métis on the 17th of June 1920 but, as Marguerite's mother had predicted, it was not a happy marriage.³⁶ After marrying, Marguerite became estranged from her family. May explains:

...you see, my dad was very domineering... And when we moved away to B.C., 1930, from then on she never saw her mother. And she wanted to go home several times but anyway, Dad wouldn't let her. So then finally we got a letter from Auntie Elise's family, that's my mother's sister, saying that their mother was very sick. And that if Mother wanted to see her mother, she'd better come home. So the girls got together and they got them-- they paid her way by bus to go to Cold Lake. She died an hour before the bus got there... Poor Mom, she hadn't seen her mother for so many years. And then she didn't get to see her alive... And it was Dad's fault. But he didn't have a heart sometimes.³⁷

Being a woman in a frontier community was a dangerous business; Marguerite was often left alone, particularly when Joseph was drinking, as was the case when May's sister was born. Marguerite delivered all her children at home, without the aid of a midwife, or sometimes even another adult present.

When Velda was born I was the only one there and I was about five years old at-- that old. But I still remember bits and pieces and -- then the neighbour lady came to find out how Mother was. Because she knew that Dad was on a drunk in town and when I answered the door she heard the baby cry. She marched right in. She said, "And where's Joe?" she said. "I don't know," Mother said. "Well, I do," she said, "and he'll wish to God he'd never met me when I catch up to him." [Laughs] ... But anyway, I had to be the one to keep the stove going, you know, to heat the water and had to be the one to sterilize the scissors and the cord and all of that for-- to cut the baby's cord.³⁸

As the eldest child, May had to both look out for her mother and siblings by keeping her

³⁵ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

³⁶ Province of Alberta, "Joseph Whitford Marriage Registration" (Edmonton, July 17, 1920).

³⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

³⁸ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

wits about her. Once, May and her mother had a run-in with the neighbour's bull:

... And there was no fences in those days so I saw this tree and I said to Mom, Mom, run to that tree," she was always pregnant. So, 'Run to that tree,' I said to her, 'and stand on the other side of it.' So-- anyway, this bull was pawing the ground and when it saw me stop and face it, he stopped and pawed the ground. And then when he turned a little bit I let him have it."³⁹

May shot the bull with her 32 Special, a gift from her father that came in very useful over the years and saved her mother and herself from what could have been a tragic accident.

Peace River or Bust

In an entry on her parents from the Cecil Lake history book May credits the prairie dustbowls of the late 1920s as the cause of the family's move to Fort St. John. She writes:

... in the spring of 1930 we could see huge clouds coming. It never rained. We only got blinding dust storms. Dad's crop blew off. I heard the adults talking about the wonderful Peace River Country; while here, even chickens were being blown away.⁴⁰

The Peace offered hope to farmers who were struck with drought and the effects of the Depression; a \$10.00 purchase of a homestead was a smart investment, and a safe place to wait out the financial and environmental storm.⁴¹ Coming home the next day from school, May saw the horses hitched up to the wagons. They were leaving for the Peace River. Even though the move was initially infused with optimism, the move to the Peace River was a difficult one for both May and her mother. According to May, her mother "hated it. She cried every day when we first came... Yeah, because you're used to the bald prairie, you can see for miles and then you come here-- she suffered from

³⁹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁴⁰ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 274.

⁴¹ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 21.

claustrophobia.”⁴² Moving away from friends and family to a frontier area was, for Marguerite, traumatic; but the dustbowl had hit Mannville and May’s father had made the decision to move his family out west:

-- life was difficult for Mother. Dad was a rodeo rider and worked on a ranch and different things and-- so it was not nice. And then in 1930-- ‘29, ‘30, it was so windy on the Prairies, it was so bone dry, and the grass was dry, and these people from Saskatchewan, they’re Dad’s friends, they all used to go coyote hunting together. But anyway, they were going to the Peace River Country where the grass is green and so all these five covered wagons moved to Fort St. John. And Mother gave away one wagonload of furniture to these Ukrainians in Athabasca because she needed those extra-- the extra team to put-- it took four horses to pull a wagon through the mud holes. It was so-- it was a rough go-- and then when we got to the other side of Taylor, you could see the valley down and there was nothing there. And Mrs. Peace said, “Hum, so this is the Promised Land.” She said, “I don’t see too much ahead here.”⁴³

Joseph and Marguerite were following the new call of the Peace River. Touted as the “Last Best West,” it was effectively the last major push of settlement on the Prairies. Widely advertised, the Peace was spoken of as a “Farmers Paradise, but nowhere in this great province is there a region of greater promise to him than that which lies along the Peace River...”⁴⁴ It was promoted as a new “Promised Land.” But the promise of settling in what was almost exclusively uncharted territory was a difficult one. Joe and his companions settled on land north east of Fort St. John (see fig 4.1) in an area that became known as Cecil Lake. May writes, “there were no boundaries, no roads, no neighbours; it was just perfect for a horse ranch or a cattle range – even for a trapline for dad. The men pooled their resources and built each family a wee log home”⁴⁵ Alongside the many

⁴² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁴³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

⁴⁴ Peace River Board of Trade, "The Peace River Country: The Last Great West" (Peace River, Alberta, 1914), 8.; David W. Leonard, *The Last Great West: The Agricultural Settlement of the Peace River Country To 1914* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, 2005), 39, 58-59.

⁴⁵ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 274.

things that Cecil Lake did not have yet, was a church for the family, or a school for May and her sisters.

Creating the Familiar in Cecil Lake

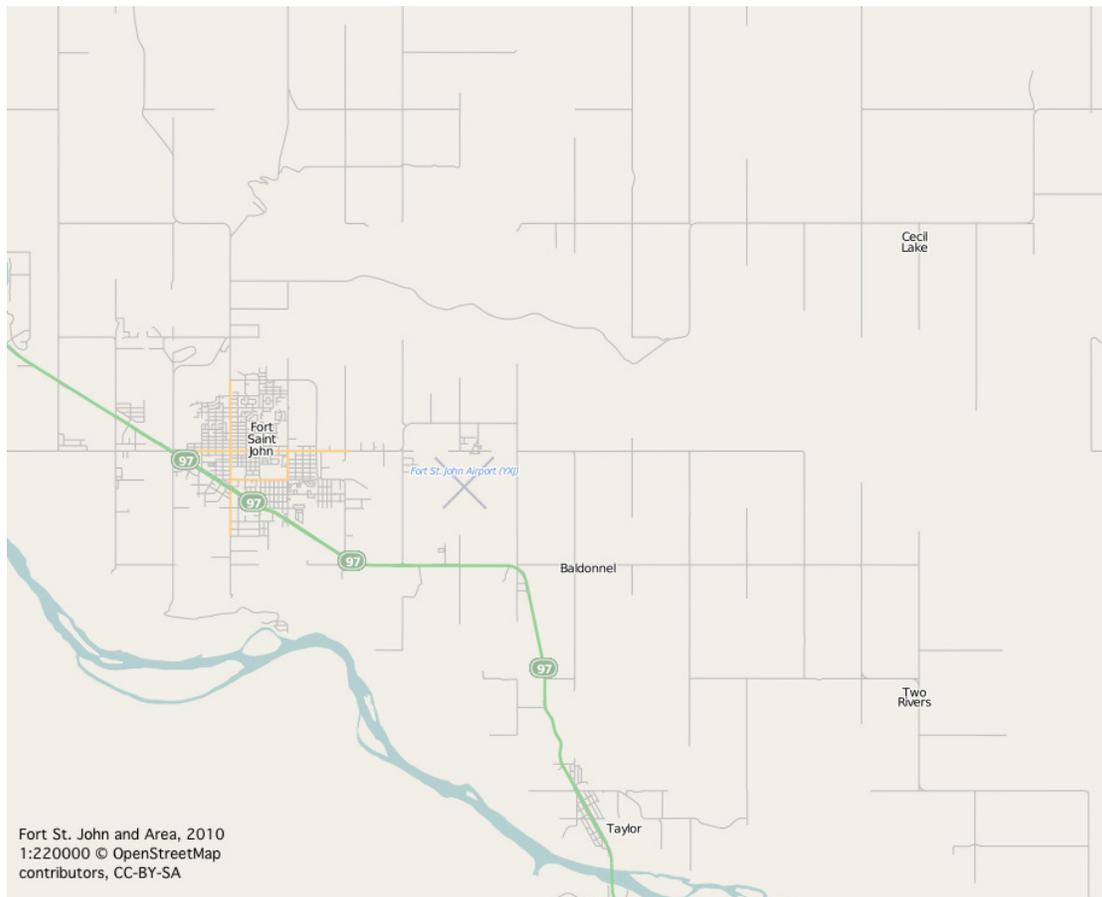


Figure 5.1 Map of Fort St. John, 2010 ⁴⁶

May's family was, like many Métis Families, devoutly Roman Catholic, and the church played a role throughout May's life. As one of the original families in Cecil Lake, and without a Catholic Church in the city, the Whitford home became a centre for the local Catholic families. The Peace River was well ministered by travelling priests, particularly members of the Order of Mary Immaculate (OMI), who ministered to the

⁴⁶ © OpenStreetMap contributors, CC-BY-SA.

small rural populations. The Catholic Church maintained an ongoing presence and pull in the Peace River Region, even attempting to influence the early settlement schemes.

Father Lemieux, one of the priests operating in the 1900s in the Peace, actively worked to create a kind of Roman Catholic colony in the region. The influence of the priests is reflected in many of the Peace River towns being named after local clerics, such as:

Grouard, Donnelly, Girouxville, and Fahler.⁴⁷ In the 1930s a travelling priest named Father Jungbluth, came to minister to the area. Emile Jungbluth was born in Strasbourg, Germany in 1908. He was inspired by Karl May's stories and began studying with the Jesuits in 1921 to become a Priest. Under the advice of Father Pierre DuChaussois and Bishop Grouard, he became an Oblate in 1928 and was ordained as a priest in 1934, so he could fulfil his wish to work amongst the Inuit of Canada.⁴⁸ He immigrated to Canada in 1935 and was sent to the Peace River to begin his ministry. May remembers Father Jungbluth at her home:

Yes, I-- my family were Catholic. Father Jungbluth used to come to our place to hold mass and the neighbours came. And then when we bought the farm [from her father in 1945] they held mass at our place and the neighbours came so-- but my faith is still with the, you know, you ask the Lord for forgiveness. But somehow I just-- not into Virgin Mary or anything."⁴⁹

In the Cecil Lake history book, May contributed the section on the Catholic Church in the area. She wrote: "Father Emile Jungbluth, a missionary, came on horseback to perform services... Later he came on his motorcycle. The first one I had ever seen... in later years, Catholics would go into town for mass once a week"⁵⁰ Church was an important activity

⁴⁷ David W. Leonard, *The Last Great West: The Agricultural Settlement of the Peace River Country To 1914* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd, 2005), 25, 37, 40.

⁴⁸ Shirley Smith Matheson, *Youngblood of the Peace* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises, 1991), 10-11.

⁴⁹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009

⁵⁰ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 74.

in the family's life, going to mass is a repeated event in May's diaries. In April 1956 May's entry notes that Easter was delayed by weather: "Easter Sunday! There was to be mass but no priest roads bad."⁵¹ She mentions one of the masses held at her house in Cecil Lake in her entry on February 3, 1957 "Bob and I got back at 3 AM slept in today then Bob crushed grain Mass here at 4 only family"⁵² One of the few comments, aside from attendance in any sort of detail in the diary is a small argument between son Andre and Bob over attending church: "Bob & Andre quarrelled over Religion confessions etc... Bob went to church"⁵³ Although it's not mentioned again, it is significant that of the few family quarrels May feels important enough to mention in the diary, this is one of the very few where a reason for the quarrel is given. Andre questioning going to church is, to May, a serious issue. Visiting missionaries, like Father Jungbluth, were essential in the Peace River for attracting donors and bringing funds to the area to build churches and schools for the new settlers.

Monica Storrs, the missionary diarist and "vanner" for the North Peace, was instrumental in setting up schools around the area and went so far as to make sure children could attend by boarding local children at her home, affectionately called the Abby. The first child to come live with her and her companions was a boy named Harvey Cheverton. In August of 1931 Monica wrote in her diary, "a small boy is coming to live here, go to school and do the chores. He and his father live six miles from the nearest

⁵¹ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1954-1958" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1954-1958) April 1, 1956.

⁵² Barrette, "Diary: 1954-1958," April 1, 1956; February 3, 1957.

⁵³ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1959-1963" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1959-1963) Dec 23, 1959.

school.”⁵⁴ The Abby took on more and more local children as time went on. In 1936 Monica Storrs described what had become her “school family”: “We have 8 boarders this year, the largest number so far, and the biggest I think we can accommodate without changing from a family into an institution.”⁵⁵ May remembered being a border, and as a lifelong advocate for education, told me about the situation for children in Fort St. John and Cecil Lake in 1930:

There was no schools. The first school was Cecil Lake School and we boarded at the teacher’s place, my sister and I, to get to grade one. I had grade one already, eh, in Manville, eh, but my sister was-- hadn’t gone to school yet. Yeah. So it was a tough go to get an education because some farmers farmed their kids with Miss Stores, she was a missionary and they-- she had a barn built and they brought their horses and their feed and rode the saddle horses to school. Yeah. But she was a real asset to the neighbourhood. Yeah. But it wasn’t everybody that got that education.⁵⁶

May and her sister Velda started at the Cecil Lake School which had opened in 1931 and were boarded with teacher Lilian Framst for their first year.

The one room Erinlea School opened for Christmas in 1932 and had the minimum eight students, two imported from another school to open it. The Schools, described by former teachers, were simple one room long buildings that had no amenities like electricity and running water. They were lit by gas lamps and furnished with a water crock, a heater, a teacher’s desk, and desks for the children. The only supplies the children had were readers [textbooks]; everything else was either brought from home or donated.⁵⁷ May notes:

⁵⁴ Monica Storrs, *God's Galloping Girl: The Peace River Diaries of Monica Storrs, 1929-1931*, ed. W.L Morton (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 228.

⁵⁵ Monica Storrs, *Companions of the Peace: Diaries and Letters of Monica Storrs, 1931-1939*, ed. Vera R. Fast (Toronto: University Of Toronto Press, 1999), 165.

⁵⁶ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁵⁷ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 59.

usually the oldest kid was the one that went to school early to start the fires, and fire the-- warm up the school. Because all the little kids would arrive-- those that could walk walked and those-- some parents brought their kids to school.... I think it took about seven or eight to open a school. Because some young people went to school just for a few days, just to help open up the school.”⁵⁸

Past grade eight school became more difficult, and in the late 1940s kids were boarded at “the Dorm” so they could attend high school. May mentions boarding her sons in town so they could attend school. On September 4th she mentions boarding Arthur with the local teacher: “Labour Day I’ll finish stooking wheat. I took tractor south. Left Arthur with Mr. George (Transpine teacher) for one month.”⁵⁹ In May’s youth, the only option they had was to board at the Abbey or with a local teacher, near Fort St. John, and May attended one the elementary schools that Monica Storrs had set up in the community.⁶⁰ May tells a story of Monica trying to teach her a lesson about charity and forgiveness that perhaps fell short:

I remember elementary because I always fought back when I was a kid, eh. I didn’t take anything from too many. And this little Irish boy, he strung a string across the desks and us girls were playing tag. And when I-- it was my turn to-- I was running behind to tag somebody and he pulled the string and I tripped. And I guess I was out of it for two hours. I don’t remember anything for two hours. And yet apparently I was okay in school. But that was a bad moment. And somebody must have told Miss Stores that, the missionary, you know, and she said to me, “Miss Whitford,” she said, “If you were going home and you saw Roy Cuthbert stuck in a snow bank what would you do?” I said, “I’d shove him in so far he’d never get out.” [Laughs] And that, I guess, was not the right answer.

Growing up in Fort St. John was not always the safest or easiest place for a girl. The dependence her family had on her, as the eldest of her Cecil Lake siblings and as the

⁵⁸ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009

⁵⁹ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1949-1953" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1949-1953), September 4, 1850.

⁶⁰ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 75.

literate aid to her mother carried a lot of responsibility. May talked a great deal about the tenacity, wit, and resilience needed to survive in the north.

But you had to be brave. But, you know, it was unreal. Being the oldest in a family you have to pick up for your little brothers and sisters. So-- and then Dad had a pet, my sister younger than me, and she could never do anything wrong and the rest of us could never do anything right. And we were going home from a Christmas concert and she-- my other sister fell out of the box and so I put my hand on Velda's mouth and I screamed at the top of my voice that Velda fell out. And Dad says, "Whoa, whoa," he says, "Stop the horses. My baby fell out. My blondie fell out." And he stopped the horses and I gave Nora time to crawl back in the wagon. Different things like that, you know.⁶¹

However, it was the drive for independence and a desire for education that made May leave home at seventeen:

Some people were so-- my dad was one of them, he didn't think that it was the thing to do to spend money on girls. And he said, "Why waste your money on a girl? They don't need grade 12 to have the neighbour's kid." So I showed him. I left home, you know.⁶²

It was this fighting spirit that May needed both to survive and to support her family, and it fuelled her desire to finally leave.

Finding her own way 1940-1960

Leaving Home

May's relationship with her father was, at best, tempestuous. Her father's temper came up often when she discussed him, particularly talking about when and why she left home. She was given an opportunity to leave by a local nurse who offered to help May find a job and finish her education.

I had talked to a nurse at the hospital, Christine Clark was her name. And she had

⁶¹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁶² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

graduated from some bible college somewhere, too, besides being a nurse. And I told her that I was not getting along with Dad because he was not-- you know how he felt about education for girls. So she said, "Any time you want to walk out, I'll give you a job," she said. Well, about two weeks later, of course, I went to-- I was mopping Mother's floor and half the floor was done when Dad stormed in and said, "The neighbours borrowed my 22 but," he said, "they haven't known enough to bring it back. I want you to go and get it," he said to me. And I said, "After I finish the floor or now?" "Now!" he said. "My word is law." I'll never forget that; I was so annoyed. ... So anyway, I went and got the gun and Mrs. Cushway said, "May, come in and have a cup of tea with us." I said, "I'd better not stop too long. It takes half an hour to walk here and half an hour to walk back and if I'm gone one minute more, guess who's going to get it." ... So anyway, she talked me into staying for a cup of tea and she was a wonderful cook, too. So she always had cakes and stuff. Well, I was a half an hour late getting home and he met me at the door. And he asked me, "And where were you? What were you doing in that half hour?" And I told him, I said, "Mrs. Cushway asked me in for a cup of tea." "Who said you could stop, having tea with the neighbours?" he said. "Well," I said, "she said that they don't even know me," and anyway he pounded me for being half an hour late. ... So I walked away the next morning. And I went to the local outpost hospital and I went to see Christine. And she said, "Well, how silly," she said, "and, you know, you've got your whole life ahead of you," she said, "I think that we'll find you something. We'll find you something." And then these missionaries came and she told them my story. ... So she sponsored me that first year. This is what I mean, you know, if it wasn't for her, what would have happened to me, eh. But anyway, I went to Bible College and I got the equivalent of grade 12.⁶³

This story is one of the most important and most often repeated stories told by May. The recorded version outlined here was the third time she had told me the story in its entirety. It illustrates several foundational things about May, her childhood, her relationship with her father, and the lessons she learned from her mother's lack of freedom and dependence. It emphasises May's commitment to learning and the role that getting an education played in making her who she is. May took the opportunity offered by the missionaries and left Fort St. John. She never intended to return to the Peace, as she never wanted to give up the freedom she had won at such a cost.

⁶³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

Meeting and Marrying

May's independence and her desire to better herself, to make her own wage, and to make sure her family has every opportunity, continues into her current life. As a result of the difficulties with her father, and witnessing her parents' troubled marriage, May was unsurprisingly not interested in getting married. She was so focused on her schoolwork that meeting men was the last thing on her mind, "I didn't-- never really wanted to ever get married and then, in fact, I was so disinterested in boys because I went to school at night and worked during the day."⁶⁴ May did eventually meet a man worth marrying when she met Bob Barrette, an Ottawa born French Canadian airman stationed with the Air Force in Calgary.

But I was going to school in Calgary, night school at Henderson's Business College. Going to school at night and working during the day. And-- so I was very busy... But anyway-- I was surprised-- surprised myself because I didn't-- never, ever planned on getting married because my mother's life was so rough. And women's lives were so tough that I thought-- now I made more money than they did, you know, than anybody did up here. So it was good. And then I was going to college there and I used to sit in the front row because I was paying for it myself and I needed to get my money's worth [laughs] and I guess Bob saw this couple-- roll of hair. I had thick, thick hair. And it was black and it rolled in two rolls. So he thought that girl with the black hair-- he wanted to meet her. So anyway, after school one night him and another guy came running down the stairway and this other guy said, "Hey, girls! Can we take you out for coffee?" I - - and that was one night we used to go dancing after class. And we had been to this dance and all these airmen were all in the corner, soldiers and sailors and we danced with sailors and we danced with soldiers. But the pilots all hung out together and they didn't ask us for a dance. So anyways, I said to them, "If we're not good enough to dance with, we're not good enough to take to that crummy joint in [laughing]," and my girlfriend said, "Oh, May, loosen up," she said. She thought that one guy was kind of cute, eh. But I never even asked Bob what his name was.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁶⁵ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.



Figure 5.2 May and Bob Barrette,
Wedding Photo Jan 31, 1942⁶⁶

After a first date at a country wedding where a Ouija board predicted that May and Bob would marry, and notwithstanding May's feelings about the institution of marriage and Bob's reservations with the occult messenger, quipping, "It's the work of the devil." They decided to marry a year and a half later.⁶⁷ May married Bob Barrette at St. Francis Church in Calgary on New Year's Eve 1942; they moved to Vulcan, where Bob was stationed, and for four years lived in a converted garage.⁶⁸ May and Bob tell the story of their first, makeshift house:

May Well, he got transferred there and then he came to Calgary to see me and I wasn't even living in the place we had before. I was living in-- main

⁶⁶ May Barrette Private Collection, Fort St. John, BC.

⁶⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23,

⁶⁸ St Francis Roman Catholic Church, "Whitford, May; Barrette, Bob Certificate of Marriage" (Calgary, December 31, 1942).

house, just renting a room for a few days and he said to me, “Where’s all our furniture? Where’s everything?” I said, “Everything’s on the train on its way to Vulcan. I did not get married to live alone.” So he said, “There’s no place to live in Vulcan. Everything’s taken up. There’s only one tree.” I said, “I’m not interested in the tree.” [Laughs] ...

Bob: There was no place to be had but I met a drayman, you know what a drayman is? He’s a-- he has a wagon and a team of horses and he does moving for people, yeah. So he said, “I know where you can buy a garage very cheap that could be used as a home temporarily.” And I agreed--

May: In a vacant lot. A vacant lot.

Bob: I agreed-- so I agreed with him and we could do that. And I dug a hole for a basement and with his team of horses he dragged that tin-covered building right over the hole and we lived in that hole--

May: For four years.

Bob: -- for four years. [Laughs].⁶⁹

May had never intended to move back to Fort St. John, the place she had escaped from, but Bob had other ideas:

... I brought Bob up here to have a look at the place, to meet the people. I hated it. I wanted to get away from here. And he fell in love with the country. And he said, “After the war’s over that’s where we’re going to live.” I said, “On one condition: that the kids get good educations even though we live there. Because,” I said, “I want to see each one of them with a grade-12 diploma.”⁷⁰

When Bob was discharged in May 1945, May moved with Bob and her family back to Fort St. John to buy her father’s farm. But May’s concern about the distance from the town’s amenities, particularly from schools, did not change. She writes in her diary after talking with the teacher she had boarded one of her sons with, “We all went south to look at Bonnell place & see teacher (Mr. George) May have to move south re school home 9

⁶⁹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁷⁰ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

PM.”⁷¹ The isolation of the farm in Cecil Lake, its distance from schools, and the opportunity an education offered, was a non-negotiable issue with May.

There and Back Again

May, Bob, and their two young sons Arthur (born 1943), Paul (born 1945) moved on to the family’s original homestead in Cecil Lake in 1945. Although the site had been her father’s farm, there was still a great deal of improvement to be done. May writes, “We arrived in Fort St. John by truck on May 7th ... we worked like slaves clearing land and doing other farm work. They [Bob and his brother Maurice] also worked out in logging camps and saw mills.”⁷² The first ten years of the diaries are full of notes about life on a remote farm. The Barrette family continued to grow with the birth of five more sons: Roger (1947), Claude (1951), twins Phillip and Pierre (1953), and Andre (1963).

It was in 1949 that May started writing in a diary again and the everyday life on the farm filled her entries. Winters were filled with an endless list of daily chores, cooking, cleaning and the ongoing hauling of snow for water: “-20° [-28°C] I hauled in oodles of snow Bob & Stanley went for their second load of wood. I did all the chores. I killed and cooked a chicken.”⁷³ The comings and goings of the neighbours are also mentioned consistently. Cecil Lake residents such as the Lynns, Nicolsons, Cushways, Copes, Kemps, and Peaces feature prominently in the diaries. May lists the neighbours’ visits to the farm but also keeps track of their personal events, births, weddings,

⁷¹ Barrette, “Diary: 1949-1953,” August 31, 1950.

⁷² Nor' Pioneer Women’s Institute, 275.

⁷³ Barrette, “Diary: 1949-1953,” January 8, 1952.

accidents, and deaths. The entries from January 12-13, 1949 provide a good example of neighbourhood activities:

January 12 Drove to Cushways early. Did Laura's hair. Came home & got ready to go to Bud Bean & Jessie Cope's wedding dance. It was good. Bunch from town.

January 13 Still Mild. Stayed overnite at Gwynns Had run away. Thanks to Tommy Nickolson's dog. Biting horse heel's! [sic] Bill Green helped me home. Feel sore & bruised."⁷⁴

The local people in the diaries are rarely identified by anything more than name. It is unusual for the entries to give any additional background information about the people that move in and out of the diary's events. It's only thorough May's Oral Histories, and community histories, such as the *Peacemakers* and *A Community Tells its Story* that we can learn more about these individuals.

Spring on the Cecil Lake farm brought more work and new chores such as prepping the fields for seeding and planting: "May 24... Bob putting together harrowing Making a drawbar. Later he harrowed & seeded grass. I rode Tiny south to get mail and also to cemetery and Kemps."⁷⁵ Tiny was one of May's horses that, alongside the other horses Flossy and Judy, were an essential part of life on the farm, and are mentioned in the diaries as frequently as neighbours and family. Selling the horses as Bob did in exchange for a tractor and later a truck was a difficult thing; it was, in many ways, like losing a family member. May writes on Dec 26, 1953 "John Peace came for Flossie & Judy it is a sad day for me!"⁷⁶ Travel in Cecil Lake in the early 1950s for May was very similar to what it had been the 1920s and 30s. In the absence of a car, May and Bob used

⁷⁴ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," January 12-13, 1949.

⁷⁵ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," May 24, 1950.

⁷⁶ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," December 26, 1953.

a team of horses to travel and work on the farm. When we spoke about the early days in Cecil Lake, the conversation turned to horses. Though May had grown up riding on the farm, Bob had not:

May: Oh, I don't remember when I started riding horses. I rode a horse into the country, yeah.

Me: Did you ride Bob?

Bob: Oh, yeah.

May: Oh, yeah, he had to learn to ride.

Bob: Yes, I had to learn to ride.

Me: You had to learn a lot of things out here, I bet.

Bob: Yeah, had to learn to drive a team too.

Driving, up until May and Bob bought their first car, was usually by tractor or by horse team. May mentions in 1956 that, "Bob went to the store with tractor and sleigh" as the ground still frozen in late April in the area.⁷⁷ One other method of getting to town was to catch a ride with a neighbour or, in a pinch, hitchhike as May did in August, 1955: "Clear nice day after most of my wash was done I hitchhiked into town. Caught ride with Earl and Pearl, met Bob at airport."⁷⁸ May and Bob did not have a car until 1958. May got her drivers licence in July of 1956. She wrote: "7. A.M. I drove to town. Took drivers test. Poured Rain all day. No Ride home."⁷⁹ It is worth noting how tricky it was that she *drove* to take her drivers test, however this could have meant driving the team (horses) or the tractor.

⁷⁷ Barrette, "Diary: 1954-1958," April 26, 1956.

⁷⁸ Barrette, "Diary: 1954-1958," August 13, 1955.

⁷⁹ Barrette, "Diary: 1954-1958," July 25, 1956.

Summer and fall on the Cecil Lake farm were busy for everyone. Bob spent most of his time in his, or his neighbour's fields, threshing grain. The men took turns working on each family's quarter.

October 3 1949 Maurice killed 11 prairie chickens to feed crew for Bob & Howard home & threshing oats on Hunter's ¼.

October 4 1949 Bob shipped 308 bushels of wheat. Crew moved to Cuthbert's for dinner I took Mrs. Gwynn home we picked horseradishes etc.⁸⁰

May was kept busy with preserving the fruit and vegetables coming out of the garden and canning game shot by the family. On July 31, 1950 she writes, "Bob & I unloaded hay. After lunch, he went to Smith with root picker I canned raspberries 13 quarts 3 pints of jam." And on September 26, 1953: "They killed a black bear. I canned meat."⁸¹ These types of entries dominate the diaries in the late summer and fall months.

May's life changed with the early death of her father in 1949. He had suffered from ill health through most of his adult life as his injuries from WWI were severe and chronic. He was sent to Edmonton for brain surgery in 1949. May writes in the Cecil Lake community history: "he died on the operating table in Edmonton on Aug 10 1949- all as a result of his war injuries."⁸² May does elaborate a bit more when she recounts her dad's death to me in our interview:

But anyway, I was nursing Roger and I had a feeling Dad had just died. So we had no power, we had no phone, none of this, none of this stuff. And Bob's brother was living with us, I said, "Maurice," I said, "could you go tell Bob," I said, "that I want to be in town in the morning, before eight o'clock, my dad just died." And he-- "Oh?" he said, so he just got up and he went out and told Bob. We were there by eight o'clock in the morning and Mom said to me, "Well, you're sure here early." And I thought, that's funny, does she not know that Dad died, you know? So anyway, but I wanted to be there when she got a telegram.

⁸⁰ Barrette, "Diary: 1954-1958," October 3-4, 1949.

⁸¹ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," July 1, 1950; September 26, 1953.

⁸² Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 274.

Sure enough, nine o'clock, telegram arrived. "Well," Mom said, "So this is now why you're here." I said, "Yes, Mom, I'm sorry that you don't know that Dad died." Well," she said, "He'd killed any love I ever had for him." She said, "So I'm not surprised." It's-- in those days, you didn't get a phone call, you just went by the things that happened to you.⁸³

In her diaries her dad's illness isn't really discussed, aside from an entry in January that mentions her dad taking a trip to the Edmonton hospital. "Clear & cold. Horses came running back to be put in barn Started to make overalls for Paul. Got 10 eggs. Dad left for Edmonton hospital."⁸⁴ May's entries on the day of his death read: "Dad was to have surgery re brain tumour. Arthur went to town with Howard. I canned carrots bought picking roots with tractor I went to store." The following day's entry echoes her oral history of the event "Bob and I left real early & were in town by 8 AM Mom got a telegram from girls Dad passed away last night I'm staying with Mom."⁸⁵ The death isn't mentioned again until a couple of days later on the day of the funeral: "Dad's funeral at 10 AM Bob came from Cecil Lake & lots of others Later we all went picking raspberries up the highway"⁸⁶ This is the last mention of Joseph in the diaries. May was finally free of her father.

The Northern Peace was unlike other areas of British Columbia that were quickly modernising like their American neighbours, with suburbs, cars and the newest appliances. In Fort St. John, and particularly in more outlying and isolated communities like Cecil Lake, this was still the frontier; people were living very much as they had in the early part of the century: without running water, telephone, electricity or motor transportation. It was only when they moved to Fort St. John in 1956 that May mentions

⁸³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

⁸⁴ Barrette, "Diary: 1954-1958," January 17, 1949.

⁸⁵ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," August 10-11, 1949.

⁸⁶ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," August 15, 1949.

applying for her first telephone in her diary in December of 1959 and having electricity installed in March 21, 1968, announcing “BC Hydro turned on our lights - oh Happy day!”⁸⁷ Once the family moved to their new farm in Baldonnel situated next to the Birley’s farm and very near to Monica Storrs’ now empty Abby, life became somewhat easier, the diaries become more about everyday neighbourhood events, work (both May and Bob were employed as well as running their farm) and less about the remote community’s backbreaking labour. The boys went to school, as May had insisted: “I pushed for it every step of the way ... But it took a lot of doing, you know. Boys are hard to keep in school, not like girls. Girls will stay in school. But boys, they’ll find a job and it pays for them to get that education.”⁸⁸

Women in Fort St. John

Reflection of the challenges to be a woman in the north was a theme that runs strongly through May’s stories. Organizations such as the Women’s Institute gave a sense of belonging and an organised venue for women to meet, both with each other and also with other Women’s Institutes, providing a wide network of support. However, the support women gave each other was not just the WI’s work for “Jam and Jerusalem,” but in knowing how to protect each other. The women helped each other to develop a keen sense of who to trust, which could mean the difference between life and death. May tells a story about how dangerous it could be for women in the North:

Yeah. But, you know, there was a Mrs. Pickle, Dorothy Pickle. She had a lock on her door. You could slide a window and look out to see who was knocking. And somebody knocked on her door early in the morning. She lives at Charlie

⁸⁷ Barrette, "Diary: 1959-1963," *Diary: 1964-1968*, March 21, 1968.

⁸⁸ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

Lake, lived there, she passed away now. But anyway, she said she went to the door and somebody-- by now he was kicking the door. And she said to him, "You can just stop your kicking right now." And he said, "I have to use the phone," he said, "I'm having truck trouble." And she said, "I'll call the company for you." "I'll do my own calling," he said as he kicked the door. So she said, "I reached and I got my shotgun," and she said, "I told him, 'Have a look in here. See what you can see and I know how to use it.'" So she said he left. But the next day there was an RCMP whistle going on and everything going on about three doors down. And they found a woman's body where he'd killed this woman that morning.... And Dorothy said, "It's things like that that I have to fight against," she said, "He didn't enter my door."⁸⁹

The precariousness of a woman's day-to-day life, the near-constant threat of violence, and the need for women to protect each other also appear in the diaries and in two of May's stories. The two accounts are of the history of her mother and her half-sister and of May's role in protecting her friend Shirley. The real theme of these stories is not simply that life was difficult, but that it was the women who helped, connected and supported each other that made a real difference to life in the Peace.

The Women's Institute

The Women's Institutes (or WI), through companionship and support, was one of the ways women coped with the pressures of rural life. The Women's Institutes are now an international organization with headquarters in London, England and have been behind several social movements in the UK since WWI.⁹⁰ Unlike many of the social organisations, like the Scouts, that had originated in the UK and were adopted later in Canada, the WI was created in the small town of Stoney Creek Ontario as a kind of

⁸⁹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

⁹⁰ Maggie Andrews, *The Acceptable Face of Feminism: The Women's Institute as a Social Movement* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1997), 17.

parallel Women's branch of the Farmers Institute.⁹¹ The WI held as its motto "For Home and Country" and encouraged a new kind of domestic education for women. "Let them educate a boy and they educate a man; let them educate a girl and they educate a family" was a central tenant to this new organization.⁹²

The WI arrived in British Columbia in 1909 and in the Peace in 1931 with the Rolla Women's Institute.⁹³ The Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute was instituted in Cecil Lake in 1933, but unfortunately no records remain of their meetings, as a nurse at the hospital where they were stored became annoyed by the accumulation and burned all the papers.⁹⁴ The minute books for the Fort St. John WI do still exist and are held at the North Peace Museum and Archives in Fort St. John. The Fort St. John branch of the WI included members Cora Ventress and Marguerite Davies who were local historians who published *The Peacemakers of the North Peace* (1973) and *The Fort St. John Pioneer Profiles* (1971), which are biographies of the early settlers in the area. The *Pioneer Profiles* interestingly includes a short biography and photo of Marguerite Whitford, May's mother.⁹⁵ The minutes book of the 1958 WI report that the members sent cards and flowers to women in the community, maintained public washrooms (in areas that did

⁹¹ Margaret Kechnie, *Organizing Rural Women: The Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario, 1897-1919* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003), 27.

⁹² British Columbia Women's Institute, *Modern Pioneers: 1909-1959* (Evergreen Press, 1960), 7.

⁹³ British Columbia Women's Institute, 34, 38.

⁹⁴ British Columbia Women's Institute, 86.

⁹⁵ Fort St. John Women's Institute, "Women's Institute Program: 1977" (Fort St. John: North Peace Archives, 1977).

not have running water), organised floats for the Stampede Parade, held rummage sales and discussed the WI's position on municipal affairs (having a seat on the council).⁹⁶

May Barrette was a member of the Nor'West WI while she lived in Cecil Lake. According to the Cecil Lake history book *A Community Tells it's Story*, which was written and edited by Nor'West WI, the Cecil Lake WI was established in the 1930s to organise a local Christmas concert and throughout its tenure had sponsored picnics, maintained a public washroom, had sold WWII Victory Bonds, was involved with the political push for universal health care and was instrumental in establishing the nursing outpost in Cecil Lake.⁹⁷ The diaries mention the WI often, and May describes going to a meeting in the winter: "Cold. Cleaned a rabbit I drove team to the store alone. WI at hospital Came home right after meeting. Turning milder."⁹⁸ May served as president in 1949 and wrote about her first meeting in office: "I swept up house & walked to Cuthberts for a WI meeting 1st experience as president ugh!"⁹⁹ May explains her history with the WI.

Well, I didn't belong to it until I came back from school and became-- getting married and stuff. But they did all kinds of things, you know... Well, they helped people out whenever there was a fire in place or somebody was really hard up they helped. Yeah."¹⁰⁰

May personally benefited from the volunteer efforts of the WI. The Nor'Pioneer WI came together to help her after the surprising birth of her twin boys:

So anyway, we moved into a good neighbourhood as far as neighbours were concerned at Cecil Lake. And then when I had the twins, nobody came to see me.

⁹⁶ Fort St. John Women's Institute, "Minute Book: Fort St. John Women's Institute" (Fort St. John: North Peace Archives, 1959).

⁹⁷ Nor' Pioneer Women's Institute, 77.

⁹⁸ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," Jan 14, 1950.

⁹⁹ Barrette, "Diary: 1949-1953," March 12 1949.

¹⁰⁰ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

Nobody said a word. And I thought that's strange because we always had baby showers and stuff for people. But when I had the twins, not a soul showed up. And then all of a sudden these sleighs pulled in, several sleighs pulled in. And it was the local W.I., you know, Women's Institute... And they had sat and sewed for days making clothes from infant to four years old and, oh, I was so tickled. Because I didn't have to sit and sew 'cause I made all the kids' clothes. That was so good of them. You could not ask for better neighbours, um-hum.¹⁰¹

It was through organisations like the WI that a community was formed in the area.

However, woman often had to look out for each other in what was not always a safe environment. Violence against women was common, even within May's own family.

Family Secrets

One of the most emotional stories that May told me was about her elder half-sister Mary. This was on the last day of our interviews, and was the only time that May became tearful during our conversations; although we had talked about several difficult and violent events in prior interviews, this one was the most personal. Mary Lambert, May's half sister, had been born several years previous to May's mother meeting Joseph. Her conception was the result of a rape. Mary was rejected by May's father and raised by May's grandmother. May's version of the story is a powerful one that best speaks for itself, however some context is useful. May began speaking about Mary in the context of her mother's ill health. Marguerite had been in and out of a coma and May had decided that her mother was hanging on to see her lost daughter so she convinced her sister to come and see their very ill mother.

... in March of '74-- no, '71, March of '71, Mother went into a coma and she was in the hospital for 10 days. But about the seventh day I said to the doctor, "Why doesn't she die? She's putting up such a fight." He said, "Sometimes people don't die until they see the person they want to see," he said, "who's missing in your family?" And I said, "Mary is, that's the only one." She lived in Clinton,

¹⁰¹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

B.C. So I phoned her up and I said to her, "You know Mother's been in this coma now for seven days," and I said, "I want you to come home." I said, "The doctor said she will not die until her life-- until she finished doing what she's supposed to do." So I said, "If you would come home, I think it's - you're the problem."¹⁰²

May then organised her sister to come to Fort St. John, although it was a difficult reunion, Mary having been estranged from the family for so long.

Yeah. And so anyway, she came and she arrived in the evening and she said-- she was tense as tense as can be, you know, because, I mean, it was all strange. And anyway, I said to her-- she said, "I'm going to sit with Mom. I'll sit here all night because I can't sleep anyway because," she said, "my nerves are ready-- shattered." So I said, "Well, I'll go to work. I've been missing an awful lot of work lately. And I said, "And I don't know how I'm going to pay the groceries if I don't go back to work."... Anyway, a quarter to nine, while we were sitting there she opened her eyes and looked around. And the nurses were yelling at each other, "She's awake, she's awake!" And the doctor came walking in and she said, "Well, you're awake." "Yes," Mom said, "and I think I'm back in the hospital *again* [emphasis]." She was tired of the hospital. And Dr. Ormston said, "Yes, Mrs. Whitford." Then she looked at Mary and she said, "Are you my Mary?" And she said, "Yes. Yes, Mom." "Oh," Mom said to the doctor, "When my daughter comes to visit me I want out of here. Out! Out!" she said. Anyway, the doctor said, "But you're very tired, Mrs. Whitford. You're very tired. So I suggest," he said, "that your daughter goes to her sister's place and have a sleep and a rest," and then he said, "you two can visit later and she can go home with you. You can go home in the morning," and he said, "and you can catch up with your lives."¹⁰³

May's mother recovered. The emotionality of the reunion is not quite echoed in the diary account. The story is generally the same, but some of the details do differ. The diary entries from the week March 6 – March 13, 1971 follow:

March 6 Mom still unconscious. We are changing places with each other to watch over her Nora staying with me

March 7 Mom regained her consciousness about 9.30 but now Velda is rather ill. What an awful wedding anniversary for Lil and Cliff

March 8 Mom very low this morning & Velda collapsed Nervous breakdown? She had surgery. Ruptured Appendix

¹⁰² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

¹⁰³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

March 9 Agnes and Alex arrived last nite & Nora and I met the 7:00 AM bus. Mary Lambert was on it. Bob went to town with all the relatives

March 10 Went back to work today 7 to 5 PM A beautiful day Nora and Bill took Mary to Dawson. Bob and I checked on Mom and Velda. Mitchells and Murrays at Mom's went home early

March 11 Worked from 7.⁰⁰ AM to 5. Bob picked me up & we went to hospital to see Mom & Velda. They are improving We went to Elks bingo in Dawson no luck

March 12 Agnes and Alex left for Calgary. This morning I'm working 7⁰⁰ am to 7⁰⁰ PM. Nora and Mary and I got together for shopping & a beer

March 13 Both Mary and Nora went home this morning. Bob and I went back to bed for awhile Bob started driving at 5 & I started work at 7⁰⁰ pm – 8⁰⁰ am.¹⁰⁴

May is less of an active agent in the diary accounts; Mary's visit seems more of an accident than an orchestrated attempt to reunite her mother and estranged sister. But, to May, the story clearly demonstrates how important her sister was to her mother. In her oral account it is her sister's arrival that woke her mother up from her coma while the diary tells the story a bit differently with Marguerite waking up the day before Mary arrived. Regardless, it is the connection between mother, daughter and sister that is important in the account. "So I was really happy that they caught up with their lives. Mother parted with her. I remember her-- my uncles coming to pick her up, eh. Because Mother had her at home and Dad was mean to her."¹⁰⁵ It was only by resolving the estrangement that the family could move on.

Mary's early life was not a happy one; she was born to a very young teenage mother (Marguerite was around 13), raised by her grandmother, and grew up with no

¹⁰⁴ May Barrette, "May Barrette Diary: 1969-1973" (Fort St. John: Private Collection, 1969-1973).

¹⁰⁵ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

contact with her mother and siblings. May tells the story of how she had reconnected with her lost sister.

So we didn't have any contact with her for all those years....But just before she left, she was a little girl, about four or whatever, years old, let's see, she would have been-- she was born when Mother was 13. Mother had been raped. And so this was the case and she had this little baby when she was 13 years old. And she got married when she was 21, something like that. So the child was, well, about seven or eight, I guess, you know. And anyway, Dad was mean to her. And I remember seeing her in bare feet and crying and Mother saying to her that Uncle George and Uncle Edward would be coming to get her. She'd go home to her grandmother and she'd be all right. So-- and then she left. But before she left, I was a lot younger than her, but I still remember-- I walked up to her and I said, "Mary, we'll get together again. We will get together. I'll find you." [Audibly upset] So it took me from then to-- oh, I can't remember, I was-- had a family, you know, must have been about, let's see, they both died in '71. Anyway, that was-- now we were going to the coast and we stopped at the museum in Clinton that was the oldest museum. And the hotel was the oldest in British Columbia. So I wanted to see that place and I said to the lady that was running the museum, I said, "How long have you lived in this town?" She told me. I said, "Do you know a Mary Lambert?" ... "Yes," she said, "she's my friend. See that little white house," she said, "at the base of the hill? That's where she lives." ... I said, "Really?" I said, "She's my half-sister." So Bob came back and he said to me, "My, they got a lot of old stuff here," he said. And I said, "Well, I want to go to the little house here." So we pulled-- we got in the car and I said to Bob, "I have a half-sister that I've never talked about." ... And I said, "She's living in that house over there and I'm going to go and introduce myself." ... And anyway I went to the house and knocked on the door. She came to the door. "Oh!" she said, "you found me after all these years." Her kids were grown up and-- so most of-- and so anyway, we had a nice visit. Bob-- Ulysses spoke French so they were-- they had a visit and from then on I kept in touch, you know, with the family. So I paid her way then to come see-- Mom and so she found out that for her own sake, Mother parted with her, it wasn't because she didn't want her, you know. So many times we-- people feel they're not wanted.¹⁰⁶

Mary's life had not gotten easier after leaving home. Her grandmother had arranged a marriage with a man who was much older than his young bride; it was "an arranged marriage to a man 30 years older than herself and it was not a happy marriage."¹⁰⁷ The age difference between herself and her new husband made life difficult for Mary: "oh,

¹⁰⁶ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

¹⁰⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

she was under pressure all the time 'cause her husband was so old. He should have been in a home, you know, not at home ordering people around.”¹⁰⁸ When I asked May if arranged marriages were common in her family she told me that that they used to be, it was just a custom at that time.

Marguerite and Mary's story is one of reconciliation. However, Mary's reunion with her family was short lived. Mary died nine months later on November 12th, 1971 at the age of 59 of heart failure. Even though her life was spent mostly separated from May and her sisters, the funeral became a family affair. May writes in her diary “Met Michells [May's aunt] in town and we all left at 3 for Clinton.”¹⁰⁹ May tells of the trip to the funeral:

“Oh, no,” Mom said. And then she looked at me and she said, “What are you going to do? What are *you* going to do?” I said, “I'm going down.” I said, “I'll take the car and go down. I know them all,” and I'd kept in touch with everybody. So Velda and-- “I'm going with you,” she said. And she had been in this coma in March and Mary had been here and then now she was going with me to go to Clinton. And Velda said, “But, Mom, you're so sick. You can't go there.” I said, “I'd like to know who would stop me if it's one of my kids that went... Well, it ends up four cars went.... And my sister flew in from Calgary, my youngest sister, and joined us there. And we-- I phoned Alec, my oldest nephew and I told him to reserve the Pines... I said, “You better reserve at least five cabins and,” I said, “I'll pay when we get there.” So that was fine. So we went and it was kind of nice.¹¹⁰

May's mother did not long outlive her eldest daughter; she passed away a month later on the 22nd December, 1971. May talks about the death of her mother in the diary:

December 22 Wednesday I worked all nite then went directly to hospital. We were beside her when she died. Nora and kids came too late.

¹⁰⁸ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Barrette, “Diary: 1969-1973.” November 15, 1971.

¹¹⁰ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August 4, 2009.

December 23 Thursday Bitterly cold. We had to go to town & do some shopping re funeral Checked on boys Phoned relatives.

December 24 Friday we all dived in to my housecleaning & later went to shop for 3 kids. Really cold. Twins and I went to mass.¹¹¹

May tells a kind of ghost story that took place after her mother's funeral once everyone had returned to the farm:

Yeah, but it was funny and then my uncles, two of my uncles and my aunt, they were here and my Uncle George, he was going to the bathroom and he got as far as halfway to the bathroom. And he went this way, then he went that way, then he turned around and he came back and sat down. Didn't say anything. And then my other uncle got up to go to the bathroom and he did the same thing, I noticed. He was kind of pushing this way and that and then he turned around and he went and sat down, he kind of looked at the-- his brother. And then my aunt was striding down there. "Hey," she said, she stopped short and she came back, she said, "I ran into Margaret there, Marguerite," that's my mother, eh. "I ran into Marguerite there," she said, "In the hallway. What's she doing here?" And I said, "She comes-- she used to come here to get away from the house," I said, "She loved coming here." Well," she said, so Eddy said-- Uncle George said, "Well, she's not quite ready to leave us yet, I guess."¹¹²

Although the story could be taken at face value, and certainly May was quite genuine when she told it, the story is most powerful when looked at as a discussion of how close they were, "She loved coming here." It demonstrates how Marguerite found solace at May and Bob's farm in Baldonnel. It was, according to May, a place of warmth and safety for her mother whose own home and life was rarely easy or content.

Violence in the Community

May's home became a place of refuge for another woman in Fort St. John who desperately needed an escape from her domestic situation. Her name was Shirley Whidden and she was the niece of Frank Whidden, a close friend of the Barrettes, who

¹¹¹ Barrette, "Diary: 1969-1973," December 22-24.

¹¹² Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, August, 2009.

had lived on the Barrette farm on and off for years. Shirley's husband, a local man named Carl Zack, had been making threats against her, threatening to kill her. May tells of how she was introduced to Shirley and her situation:

... And then another time that gun saved my life I-- Frank Whidden used to live with us and I was working in the garden in the morning and this taxi pulled in. And this beautiful lady got out and she had a little baby. It was not too small. Anyway, she said, "Frank waved to me to come to the house." So I came to the house and he said, "This is my brother's daughter," he said, "from Truro, Nova Scotia.." And he said, "She's been living with a guy and he has threatened to kill her if she ever leaves him," he said. And he said, "Shirley," he said, "this is May, and there is nothing she can't handle," he said, "So we'll leave." They were going hunting. "So we'll leave," he said, "she can handle it."¹¹³

May was left with Shirley and her daughter Gloria, and began to go about her chores on the farm. What is interesting is the role May is given in the narrative, as a protector for this young mother and her daughter; May described as the most capable person around as "there's nothing she can't handle."

Carl Zack was less convinced that May could protect Shirley, and attempted to kill her again while she was under May's watch.

So anyway, after they left this man pulled in and he was a nice, respectable man. I thought to myself, they must have their wires crossed somehow. So I went in to feed the chickens but I didn't feed them. I just got the feed out and went to the gate where-- the chicken fence and then I ran into the house to check. And she was flat on her back right there in the corner with him on top of her with his hands and-- on her throat. Her eyes were out of their sockets and he was killing her. And I kicked him as much as-- I kicked him hard. It was just like kicking a post; he didn't respond. So I went into my room, picked up my rifle. Came out and put in a couple of shells in it. When he heard it "click," he looked up. "No mere woman pulls a gun on me," he said. So I said, "Really." I said, "Do you want to walk out or do you want me to drag you out because," I said, "you're going out." And so he knew I meant it. He looked at me and then he got as far as the door. "I'm reporting you," he said. I said, "Go ahead." So I followed him out until he got in his car and he got about halfway out the gate and he stopped and looked back. And I motioned for him to get going. And he got going, just a cloud of dust. ... And so when the policeman came he said to me, "Are you the lady that

¹¹³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

pulled a gun on a man?" I said, "Yes, and," I said, "I would do it again. I saved her life. I saved my own," I said to him. And I said, "And I would do it again."¹¹⁴

The events also appear in May's diary but in a much more matter-of-fact way:

October 27, 1967 Shirley & Gloria here since last night. I ran Carl out this afternoon. Ty and Charlene came. Frank and Andre came home from hunting. No luck Carl Zack tried to kill Shirl[e]y at the end of gun¹¹⁵

The details are a bit different than in the oral account, May mentions that "Carl tried to kill Shirl[e]y at end of gun." which appears quite different from May's description that he was choking her. However, that part of the entry was written over the original diary, in slightly different ink, and may refer to the earlier incident that Frank had referred to, and his reason for bringing Shirley to May for protection. Shirley sadly had not learned her lesson and went back to Carl at least twice:

November 1, 1967 I took Shirl[e]y to court and left her with Charlene Liedermiers. She got Carl out and Stayed with him

November 3, 1967 Bob and I dashed to govt office at noon, Shirl[e]y, girls and I went to town. Mrs. McFadden "borrowed" Danielle. Carl kidnapped Shirl[e]y again

November 5, 1967 Shirl[e]y has moved back to Carl Zack last nite. We all went to 10 AM Mass. We all stayed home.¹¹⁶

The events finally come to a head a week later when Shirley is again brutally attacked by her husband. May explains that Shirley was with her at work and needed to go next door to the drugstore. So May told her to go there and then to the Fort Bar where Frank and Bob were having a drink for Armistice Day (now known as Remembrance Day) but Shirley didn't make it:

¹¹⁴ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

¹¹⁵ Barrette, "Diary: 1964-1968," October 27 1967.

¹¹⁶ Barrette, "Diary: 1964-1968," November 1-3, 1967.

... and then I went to the bar myself to see if she was with her uncle. And I said to Frank, "Where's Shirley?" "She's supposed to be with you," he said, "and you're supposed to look after her," he said to me. "Where is she?" About that time she fell through the door and she had my clothes on and my clothes were just in shreds. So I jumped up and I said-- I put my arms around her and I said, "What's the matter, Shirley?" She said, "He caught me between the drugstore and the bar," she said. "And," she said, "he took me down to that swamp," (that's where the mall is now,) she said, "he took me down to the swamp and raped me," she said. "Tore these clothes to shreds," she said. "Well, well," I said, "we're going to--" "Frank," I said, "we're going to have to do something because," I said, "I'll be up for murder that's what's going to happen." I said, "Because I won't take that." So, "I haven't got any cash," he said. "Oh, well," he said, "I'll get it. I'll go from man to man, I'll have it in just no time," which he did. And everybody knew Frank and that he's forever helping people. So he got the airfare to go to Truro, Nova Scotia. So we put her on the plane that night but I phoned her dad and I told her dad to meet the plane because I said, "We put her on the plane because," I said, "I have a temper and," I said, "I would soon be up for murder if I didn't do something. So," I said, "she's your daughter," and I said, "I'm sure you love her so take care of her." So they did. We put her on the plane. She went home and then Frank's sister was telling me, she said, "When I heard that my niece," that was her niece, she said, "was here, I came in from Dartmouth," she said, "to come and see her. But you know, she wouldn't open up. She wouldn't tell us what happened. She just said that May Barrette had rescued her and that if she ever comes East that-- to treat her nicely."¹¹⁷

What May wrote in her diary is a less storied, more factual, and unflinching account of the day's events:

November 11, 1967 Claire Taylor and I went to clean up Rogers apartment & in afternoon we went to town, Took Shirl[e]y to the airport & saw her off. Carl Zack kidnapped & raped Shirl[e]y Widden.¹¹⁸

May did go to Cape Breton to visit Frank's family several years later and was reunited with Shirley, and was treated very "nicely." This type of terse account is reflective of the types of accounts found in frontier diaries, short, factual and almost unemotional. There is a equality here in the list of events, cleaning the apartment is described in as much detail as the rape and "rescue" of Shirley, but in May's oral history Shirley's story is given in detail.

¹¹⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

¹¹⁸ Barrette, "Diary: 1964-1968," November 11, 2009.

Shirley was not alone; there are many entries in the diaries that recount women facing beatings and injury, including women in May's immediate family. May writes about how her sister Velda was also beaten by her husband: "Henry clobbered Velda over head with whiskey bottle she's in hospital out on Sun."¹¹⁹ A family member also hurt May's mother. May's brother Floyd had been at his mother's place when he ended up seriously injuring her: "Mom & boys had a fight, Floyd broke Mom's arm! Velda & Frank took her to hospital"¹²⁰ Floyd is reported as consistently drinking in the diaries so it is very likely that this fight is the result of what May calls "Going on a drunk".

Shirley's story, though she does eventually escape with help from her uncle and the Barrettes, is a brutal example of the violence women suffered in Fort St. John. It is also an excellent example of the power of an oral history in comparison to written. May's oral version is more arresting for its context, description and immediacy. The diary account may be factually the same as the oral story but it lacks the strength of the storyteller. May's delivery is courageous and unflinching.

In the diaries, like other autobiographical women writers, May establishes herself only in relation to what she reveals about others and their actions or events. As theorist Mary Jean Corbett points out, in autobiographies women are often only knowable through her interpersonal interactions, public action is more important than her private thoughts. Corbett writes that "Some middle class women writing autobiography minimize

¹¹⁹ Barrette, "Diary: 1969-1973," February 17, 1973.

¹²⁰ Barrette, "Diary: 1964-1968," February 26, 1965.

risk by laying little or nothing on the line”¹²¹ Like the diary entries about May’s sister Mary coming to see her mother, no place in the text does it read that May was the active agent in the reunion, she just writes about the event itself, “Nora and I met the 7:00 AM bus. Mary Lambert was on it.” It is similar to when May helped Shirley leave her husband, “Took Shirl[e]y to the airport & saw her off.” It is only in the context of May’s narrative that she becomes a more active agent in the stories. The diaries don't mention that May paid for Mary’s bus ticket, or that May was instrumental in getting Shirley on a plane, away from her abusive husband.

May identifies and is connected to the women around her. May also does not racialize her accounts, and it is her identification with her community in the Peace River that makes her transcend the sole voice of a woman writer, rather it shows her story as a part of a collective voice of women. Sweet Wong calls this a kind of multivocality, which articulates:

an indigenous woman’s first-person-plural subjectivity that is evident both temporally (in the myths histories, legends genealogies and gossip that link the so-called prehistoric to the contemporary and highlight their interrogation) and spatially (in the site specific narratives that situate individuals in a shared land base and link travellers over great distance)¹²²

This is May’s greatest strength as a storyteller, and adds worth to her already considerable autobiographical voice. She is, on her own, a remarkable person, independent, and single-minded. She has lived an exceptional life. However, it is her

¹²¹ Mary Jean Corbett, "Literary Domesticity and Women Writers Subjectivities," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 255-263 (Madison: The University Of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 118-119.

¹²² Hertha D. Sweet Wong, "First-Person Plural: Subjectivity and Community in Native American Autobiography," in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 168-178 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 168.

communal voice, that Sweet Wong identifies as a hallmark of many Native American autobiographies (including *Life Lived Like a Story*), which speaks for the women in her larger community. Her polyvocality is the hallmark of an exceptional-typical individual; she not only represents herself but also that of her wider community. May sees herself as a member of a sorority of pioneer woman, regardless of whether they are white, First Nations or Métis. In one conversation, when I had asked her about what being Métis meant, May started by talking about the strength of the two peoples (the First Nations and the white traders), and how they were both pioneers. However, in mid story May switched and started talking about how people had come to respect and honour other women that had lived on the prairies. May and Bob were looking for a camping spot in Drumheller and they met a First Nations man who spoke to them about the women in his community:

“we honour the Ukrainian woman because if it wasn’t for the women, the men would not have survived.” He said, “They have the strongest willpower and they worked and their-- with their feet in canvas, wrapped in canvas,” he said, “and worked with them, eh.” So he said, “They deserve to be honoured. And our park,” he said, “I’ll show you. I’ll give you a map as to how to get there.” So he told me now to get there. And he said, “And they ask you who told you about this,” and he wrote his name down. Not only did we not get asked who told us, but they wouldn’t charge us. And we camped there overnight and then I took a walk the next day to see all these Ukrainian women that had been the backbone with their nation.¹²³

These are the women that May identifies with, the women that are the backbone of their communities, women that support one another, like the women of the WI and the Ukrainian women.

The women in May’s stories are survivors, not victims. May’s mother outlives her father, May’s sister reunites with her family and Shirley escapes her abusive husband.

¹²³ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

May clearly identifies herself both the backbone of her family. Like her mother and Shirley, May is a survivor, “I came out of it anyway. I knew I would because I survived so much. I’ve-- an awful lot of things have happened. Yeah. When you’re the oldest and you’re the survivor, it’s a rough go sometimes.”¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 23, 2009.

Chapter 6: May as Elder/ Storyteller/ Advocate

*But I came out of it anyway.
I knew I would because I survived so much. I've-- an awful lot of things have happened.
Yeah. When you're the oldest and you're the survivor, it's a rough go sometimes.*
May Barrette

Exceptional Typical

This account of May Barrette's life has been constructed through her own words, both written and spoken, and is only a fragment of the remarkable woman she is. However, the fragment that I have included here exemplifies her position as an *exceptional-typical* individual within a western Canadian History. Her childhood, coming to the Peace River as a pioneer, leaving to pursue an education, returning as a mother and matriarch of a family, and taking on her self-described role as a "diary keeper" and keeper of the area's stories, exemplify what Jill Lepore says is the value of a microhistorical subject: "it lies not in its uniqueness but in its exemplariness, in how that individual's life serves as an allegory for broader issues affecting the culture as a whole."¹ May's experiences as a woman in the north both her personal experiences of violence and community are not unique, but her drive and her desire to communicate it, as well as her communal position as an aboriginal writer, are.

It was essential for me, when putting together this thesis to rely as much as possible on May's own words and stories to tell her history. Although I do, of course, provide context and commentary I felt that the majority of the narrative should be told by May herself, and in her own words. The power of her personal voice is essential to the

¹ Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001), 133.

methods undertaken in this work. As Mike Evans explains in the book *What it is to be a Métis*: “the fundamental methodological point is that sometimes the best way to ensure that Aboriginal community members are represented fairly is for researchers to stay silent, and let people speak for themselves.”²

I have focussed primarily on her life pre-1978 precisely because May focussed on that period. Almost all of May’s stories took place before 1978 (the most recent stories appearing in the 1974-1978 diary) and I felt that her decision to tell stories up to that point in time provided a time frame that I would also use to tell her story. I did, of course, read and take notes on all the diaries that May shared with me (up until 2008), but with her oral histories ending in the 1970s I felt that to continue on in absence of an oral history, an essential element of May’s story – that is her own interpretive frame - would have been missing.

Schooling through Story

It would be remiss to not look at May as an Elder alongside her role as a storyteller. To be an Elder is not accomplished by attaining a certain age, but by assuming a level of respect and authority as a knowledge keeper in the community. Directly relevant to my work with May as a whole is this authority; as an Elder, May is a traditional educator for her community. In her work with Dorothy Chartrand, a Métis Elder, historian and storyteller, Judy Iseke-Barnes writes that Elders “allow us to

² Mike Evans, Marcelle Gareau, Lisa Krebs, Leona Neilson and Standeven, *What it is to be a Métis*, ed. Mike Evans (Prince George: UNBC Press, 1999).

understand the contributions of Métis people, past and present.”³ These stories pass on important information about identity, local history as well as family biographies.⁴ May’s contribution, through her stories and sharing of the diaries, is not just an act of generosity, but the responsibility of an Elder, passing on what she feels we need to learn. Métis storytelling is an intergenerational act; traditionally, “Elders were expected to pass on their knowledge on to younger people, both orally and by demonstration.”⁵ By allowing me to listen and record her stories, and by sharing her diaries May is fulfilling an advocacy role she takes very seriously, and one she has acted on within her family and in her community. For May, her role is to encourage youth to better themselves, and to provide support for lifelong learning.

May continues to be a passionate advocate for education. She describes why she joined the Fort St. John Métis Association: “I thought the thing to do is to join the company, find out what their laws are about education for Métis kids. And I pushed for it every step of the way and I got that award but anyway-- so I have six grandkids that graduated from universities.”⁶ The award May mentions was a special award given to her by Métis Nation British Columbia for recognition of her work advocating education for Métis youth. May describes what makes it so important to advocate for Métis youth in particular:

³ Judy Iseke-Barnes, "Grandmothers of the Métis Nation: A living history with Dorothy Chartrand," *Native Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (2009), 69-98.

⁴ Lawrence Barkwell, Leah M. Dorion and Audreen Hourie, *Metis Legacy: Michif Culture, Heritage and Folkways*, Vol. II (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2006).

⁵ Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 10.

⁶ May Barrette and Bob Barrette, interview by Erin Dolmage, *May Barrette Interview*, Fort St. John, BC (July 24, 2009).

Mostly we-- I entered it because it was carrying on with education for Métis kids. If a kid has the get up and go to study hard and be somebody, you don't tear them down. You encourage them, which they don't do because-- there's a joke they tell about the white man and the Métis out fishing. And then this white man, when they got home with the pails he only had one or two fish in his pail. Where did the rest of them all go? They jumped out. There was nobody to hold them back not like a-- this Métis one. So, you know, because you're supposed to congratulate people for their achievements but you don't get that kind of congratulation sometimes.⁷

However, it was not just Métis kids that May worked for and supported in her community. Seeing the young people of the community graduate, particularly those from poorer or troubled homes was of personal interest to May.

When the grandson of an old friend could not attend his high school graduation, May stepped in to make sure he could attend his convocation.

And-- but Avery he had to beg for a pencil, even, if he wanted a pencil and his mother wouldn't help him. And his grandmother did. And I said to him, "I want to see you graduate. I want to see you, Avery, with a grade-12 diploma. Show your mother that you can do it." I said, "Never mind her." So he did and he came to see me at work one day and he said, "You know, I got good marks. I got-- I'm eligible to get a grade-12 diploma. But I can't go because I haven't got the clothes to wear." I said, "Is that all?" I said, "Well, my son graduated," this is Andre and I said, "he grew out of his uni-- grew out of his suit." I said, "Come up to the farm and we'll try it on." So I bought a shirt and I gave him \$60 for a pair of shoes and his grandmother did everything she could, too, to help him. And then I was at work on the graduation; I couldn't go to the graduation. I was working. So this taxi pulled in and I didn't know the person getting out. And then I recognized the suit. And he had his hair cut.⁸

Avery had come specifically to see May on his graduation day, to say thank you personally for the encouragement and support she had given him. For May there was no better thanks than to see him dressed and ready to graduate, you could hear the pride in her voice when she talked about him.

But the biggest surprise I ever got from my family was I got invited to a young

⁷ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

⁸ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

man's [Avery's] birthday party. ... So I went and I looked around, the place was packed. It was just cars galore there. And I took a salad with me 'cause I had asked what I was supposed to bring. And when I walked in even George was there and I couldn't believe this 'cause George doesn't go anyplace, you know, public. He doesn't like the public. So he was there. And when I walked in they started singing, "She's a jolly good fellow." So anyway, that was a going away party and where am I going? I thought-- and this is what I said. And here they gave me a ticket for two for-- to Hawaii for two weeks. But I was so surprised with-- you do these things for your kids, never expecting a return.⁹

It was on the occasion of Avery's 21st birthday, one of the kids in the community that she had gone out of her way to support, where May's family found an opportunity to thank her publicly for everything she had done.

May's life stories: her choice to leave her abusive home, her leadership in the community, her drive to get an education and to make sure that her family had every opportunity to succeed, is not just a series of events in her biography, a single life story or a simple tale about her life; May's stories are a series of communicative acts, each with a message. By making her life accessible, she is teaching by example exactly what an education and believing in oneself achieves. She is schooling through story. This was the reason she chose to become involved in this research project, why she and Bob sat for the three interviews, and why May wanted to share her diaries. It was to help support education, both mine as the immediate recipient of her stories and knowledge, and by extension to teach whoever reads this thesis. Although May's oral and written histories and my reworking of them for this thesis are focussed on the minute details of her life; it is important to know that ultimately it is not the details of her life that matter in the end; it is the message that the details teach. And that is what May has taught me.

⁹ Barrette and Barrette, *Interview*, July 24, 2009.

May's work contributes not only to the history of herself and her community but fulfils a need for Métis Women's voices. Grandmothers, alongside the male storytellers in the community, share community histories through their stories. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, the point of these is not to "simply tell a story or to tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place."¹⁰ Unfortunately women, particularly the voices of Métis women, are still needed to complete this collective knowledge that Smith is advocating. Creative nonfiction such as Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, and the poetry of Marilyn Dumont are a starting place for women's stories to be produced and heard. However, there is still a significant place waiting to be filled for storytellers like May. Further work with Elders by community-minded scholars, and the respectful collection of family and community histories in areas outside the Red River in particular is needed to help give voice to our wide and disparate Métis community. Future research should concentrate on working with Elders to help them share their stories, before they are irrevocably lost. By conscientiously working with these living histories we contribute to shifting a historical focus to the previously overlooked histories that exist across the Métis homeland.

Conclusion

By approaching May's stories and histories through a microhistorical lens I hope to have added another small but significant tile to the mosaic of Métis, Aboriginal and Canadian history. May's experience as an exceptional individual allows us insight into life growing up in the frontier of the Last Great West. In particular, she offers insight into

¹⁰ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Zed Books, 1999), 144.

the sometimes harrowing and often strengthening experience of being a women living in the Peace River. The powerful combination of May's written and oral history offers a unique and disparate view into a singular life. Her histories perform a dual function; they inform but more importantly they teach. By allowing a glimpse into May's early life growing up on the farm, by discussing the complex individuals that made up her family, and by expressing her ongoing passion for life at the age of 89, May teaches a powerful, and unforgettable lesson about self determination. A lesson I am very grateful and honoured to have been taught.

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Map

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North Peace Museum photograph collection. North Peace Museum, Fort St. John, British Columbia

Peace River Country Research Project collection. The Glenbow Archives, Calgary, Alberta.

Province of Alberta Vital Statistics. The Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

Province of British Columbia Vital Statistics. The Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria, British Columbia.

Appendices

Appendix I: Métis Identity

Identity is a foundational issue in Métis studies as community, political groups and the Métis Nation themselves are developing a process of self identification based on tradition, genealogy and the new legal definitions that have come about through the Canadian Constitution and the 2005 R v Powley legal decision, which are discussed later in this chapter. Jean Barman and Mike Evans write “[i]n many ways, today’s uncertainty over who is Métis arises from conflicting views of the historical processes involved in what Peterson and Brown call being and becoming Métis.”¹ A great deal of scholarship has been written specifically on the subject of Métis identity including Brown and Peterson’s *Being and Becoming Métis*, Nicole St. Onge’s *Saint-Laurent Manitoba* and articles by Paul Driben (1985), Trudy Nicks et al (1985), Paul Chartrand (1991), Joe Sawchuck (1992), and Heather Devine (2001). St. Onge’s work on Saint-Laurent Manitoba is particularly interesting as it chronicles the development and subsequent shifting self-identity of an entire Manitoba community. Saint-Laurent is quite different from the better-known Métis communities as it developed outside of the Métis nexus of the Red River. Indeed, St. Onge urges, “great caution be used in attempting to define the social, economic, and ethnic parameters of Red River ‘Métiness’” as compared to the

¹ Jean Barman and Mike Evans, "Reflections on Being, and Becoming, Métis in British Columbia," *BC Studies*, no. 161 (Spring 2009), 60.

development of other communities.²

Even the word Métis has consistently been in flux. Louis Riel, the leader of the 1869 and 1885 Rebellions wrote that: “The French word Métis is derived from the Latin participle *mixtus* which means ‘mixed’; it expresses well the idea it represents...and becomes, by that fact, a suitable name for our race”³ However, there were other terms that were used. The dual descent people who lived in these communities were also referred to as *Brois Brûlés*, Canadian Cree, variations on Breed including Scotch Breed, German Breed, French Breed etc... as well as the more commonly used Half-Breed.⁴ Historically Métis was the term for the largely catholic, francophone population that descended from the North West Company fur traders brought out of Quebec, while the term English Métis or Half Breed was used for the families of the mostly protestant, Orkney born men who worked for the Hudson’s Bay Company.⁵ The adoption of the single term Métis came through the efforts of the governing bodies such as the Métis National Council in their attempt to have the Métis legally recognized as a distinct Aboriginal people and is now the term used in all contemporary legal and constitutional language.

Although several important pieces of legislation formally use the term Métis, it is still uncertain what exactly the term means. Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution

² Nicole St. Onge, *Saint-Laurent Manitoba: Evolving Métis Identities, 1850-1914* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2004), 3.

³ Louis Riel, "The Métis: Louis Riel’s Last Memoir," in *Hold High Your Heads: History of the Métis Nation in Western Canada*, trans. Elizabeth Maguet, 200-210 (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1982), 200.

⁴ Paul Chartrand, "Terms of Division: Problems of Outside Naming for Aboriginal People in Canada," *Journal of Indigenous Studies* 2, no. 2 (1991), 12.

⁵ Chartrand, 12.

reads: “(1) The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. (2) In this Act, ‘aboriginal peoples of Canada’ includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada.”⁶ However, this does not define what Métis could mean in the same way that the Inuit and First Nations were more easily defined, as their status was predetermined by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Métis Leadership, in the form of the Métis National Council, put forward their own definition in 2002 that reads: “Métis means a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation Ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation.”⁷ Again, self-definition is key, meaning the individual chooses to identify as Métis, and not as an Indian. This can be problematic; legislation, particularly as Bill C31, again changed who was legally recognised as a status Indian, and who was not. Additionally, several native communities that were long term Non-Status Indian settlements, such as the Loon River Cree First Nation, have had their designations as Non-Status communities arbitrarily changed by the federal government and have become reserves, as recently as the 1990s.⁸

The Supreme Court’s *R v Powley* decision, handed down in 2003, further redefines the idea of what is a Métis by putting emphasis on present and historic community as the deciding factor as to whether a person is able to exercise constitutional aboriginal rights. The decision reads “aboriginal rights are communal rights: They must

⁶ Government of Canada, *Constitution Act, 1982*, September 19, 2008, http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/annex_e.html#II (accessed March 26, 2009).

⁷ Métis National Council, *Who are the Métis: National Definition of the Métis*, December 4, 2008, <http://www.metisnation.ca/who/definition.html> (accessed March 26, 2009).

⁸ Christine Schreyer, "Nehiyawewin Askîhk: Cree Language on the Land: Language Planning Through Consultation in the Loon River Cree First Nation," *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 2009: 448.

be grounded in the existence of a historic and present community, and they may only be exercised by virtue of membership in the present community.”⁹ However, what this historic community entails is still not fully defined by the decision. What the decision did establish is what is now broadly termed as the “Powley test” that is used to assess an individual’s legal Métis citizenship. The decision reads that the individual requires “three broad factors as indicia of Métis identity for the purpose of claiming Métis rights under s.35: self-identification, ancestral connection and community acceptance”¹⁰ The Supreme Court did not define what exactly made a person Métis, in fact the decision pressed for development on the part of the government to produce a more systematic method of identifying Métis rights holders. The decision also left the door open to the possibility that the Métis identified under s.35 could refer to more than one particular group of people.¹¹ Powley addresses these potential developmental and geographical differences by noting that, particularly given the vast territory of what is now Canada, we should not be surprised to find that different groups of Métis exhibit their own distinctive traits and traditions.”¹² However, it is currently the three major determining factors: self-identification, ancestral connection, and community acceptance that determine whether a person is constitutionally Métis.

⁹ *R. v. Powley*, SCC 43, [2003] 2 (S.C.R. 207, 2003), para 27.

¹⁰ *R. v. Powley*, para 35.

¹¹ John Weinstein, *The Quiet Revolution West: The Rebirth of Métis Nationalism* (Markham, Ontario: Fifth House Publishers, 2007), 158.

¹² *R.v. Powley*, para 11.

Appendix II: Introductory Letter

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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3333 University Way
Kelowna, BC Canada V1Y 1V7
Phone: (250) 807-3401
Fax: (250) 807-8001

Principal Investigator:
Dr. Mike Evans
Head: Community, Culture, and Global Studies
Phone: (250) 807-9401
Email: mike.evans@ubc.ca
Co Investigator
Erin Dolmage
Masters Student: Community Culture and Global Studies
Phone: 250-364-4474
Email: erin.dolmage@ubc.ca

Tansi,

First, thanks very much for your interest in helping with the Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace History project. It's great you would like to participate.

If you decide to let us use your contributions, we will include the material with the contributions from other people and some archival research and a research thesis. The thesis, and any subsequent research derived from the research will be written for the completion of a Masters degree at UBC Okanagan. Any archival materials collected will be housed with the researcher and at UBC Okanagan; everyone who participates will be sent a copy of their interview tapes and transcripts before the thesis is actually submitted. We may also make a copy of some of the materials available through the Internet (we will send you the web address where you can see it). When everything is completed we will send a copy of the Thesis, and any subsequent research (academic articles etc that arise from the research).

So the question is, will you let us call you and arrange for an interview, and collect any materials that you think will be helpful? Remember, these will be publicly shown papers, so other people will see them and your part in them. They will see and hear what you said and did and know that you are the person talking and writing.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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Co Investigator

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Email: erin.dolmage@ubc.ca

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So the question is, will you let us call you and arrange for an interview, and collect any materials that you think will be helpful? Remember, these will be publicly shown papers, so other people will see them and your part in them. They will see and hear what you said and did and know that you are the person talking and writing.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



OKANAGAN

Included with this letter is a full explanation of the project and a copy of the consent form we will be asking you to sign if you would like to participate in this project.

We will call you in a few days to see if you are interested in participating and are looking forward to talking with you.

Meegwinh.

Mike and Erin

Appendix III: Consent to Use Materials: Ethics, Research Guidelines, and the Conditions for Research for the Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: A Microhistory

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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Ethics, Research Guidelines, and the Conditions for Research for the Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: A Microhistory

This document is designed to deal with several ethical issues arising from research on the May Barrette Journals. Offered below are a number of guidelines for the conduct of researchers and the disposition of research materials and results.

Purpose

The thesis project involves the collection and research of diaries on a prominent Métis family in Fort St John and the Northern Peace in British Columbia/Alberta. The thesis by Erin Dolmage will be written for the completion of a Master degree at UBC Okanagan. My interest is in British Columbian Métis and the examination of Journals and Diaries as well as the collection of oral and written histories. Although the history of the Métis People on the Prairies, particularly southern Manitoba, and Saskatchewan is quite extensive, the history of the Northern British Columbian Métis People is only now beginning to be documented. Particularly important is the connection of the entire northeastern Fur Trade that developed across Northern Alberta into northeastern British Columbia. The research will be concentrating primarily on the diaries written over the last 66 years by an Métis elder named May Barrette. Mrs. Barrette is a person of interest not just from her life and her lifelong interest in diary writing but also through her associations and connections with other fur trade families.



By working with Mrs. Barrette's journals I hope to develop a fuller history of the Métis presence in northeastern British Columbia and the Peace River country. The fieldwork will primarily take place in the North of BC for approximately 60 days in July and Aug of 2009. Researchers will travel to Fort St John from Kelowna where they will be interviewing Mrs. Barrette and photographing and digitally archiving her extensive diaries in their entirety. Additionally research at various archives and Fur Trade Forts in Northern British Columbia and Alberta including: the South Peace archives in Grande Prairie, the Fort St John Archives, the Glenbow archives in Calgary as well as archives in Dawson Creek will be done to develop the background to the Beaton and Barrette families and a fuller picture of the Métis in Northern British Columbia.

Study Procedures

1) Guidelines governing the construction of research instruments and of research design generally.

- All research tools (interview schedules and protocols) will, wherever possible, be developed in consultation with the subject, Mrs. May Barrette. All research tools will be presented to her for approval before implementation.
- An outline of all research initiatives into archival, census, or other documentary materials will be presented to and cleared by the participants or their representative before implementation.

2) Guidelines governing the conduct of researchers.

- Faculty supervisors will provide all student researchers with a set of guidelines governing their conduct in the project.
- All researchers will maintain the confidentiality of interview materials and written journals except in so far as Mrs. Barrette agrees to release the material for use by the project (see guideline numbers three and four).

3) Guidelines for insuring that the Project has the subjects informed consent at each step of the project.

- At the first meeting of the participant and their interviewers, the interviewers will explain the interview process and invite questions from her. She will be informed verbally of her rights within the interview process (ie the right to speak, and the right to refuse any question, the right to have present anyone she wishes during the interview, and a person to contact and inform if any difficulties arise during the interview). After this discussion she will be invited to sign the form consenting to the interview (should she/he refuse, the interview will stop). If consent is given, the interview will proceed.
- At the conclusion of all interviews, the interviewer will ask again for the participant's consent to transcribe and edit the results of the interview. Verbal approval will be deemed sufficient for this purpose.



-Once transcriptions and editing are completed, the results will be returned to the participant for correction or revision. Once she has indicated that the transcripts and edited version of the transcripts are acceptable, the interviewer(s) will seek permission to use this material in an edited volume of oral and written histories.

-At this time several options will be outlined to the participant:

- a) The interview tape and transcriptions can be returned to the participant with no further work or use of the interview materials.
- b) The participant may grant permission to use the interview for the project, but ask that the materials be returned to her, and not be stored by the project.
- c) The participant may grant permission to the project to use and store the material, but restrict who may subsequently access or use this material.
- d) The participant may grant permission to use and store the material without any restriction beyond that decided by the researchers and the participant.

- A post-interview informed consent form (containing a clear discussion of their options) will be presented and verbally explained to the participant for her to sign (or not).

4) Guidelines governing the archiving of research materials.

- Full copies of all tapes, journals, transcripts, and publications resulting from this project will be supplied to:

- a) Mrs. Barrette, any other participants or her immediate family
- b) The Supervising Faculty (unless requested otherwise by the participants or Mrs. Barrette) will keep a copy of all tapes, transcripts, and publications arising from the project.

5) Guidelines governing the return of research materials to participant.

-Mrs. Barrette, and any other participants will receive one copy of the tape and transcripts of their interview, and a copy of all publications arising from the overall project.

6) Guidelines governing the production of a volume of the community's histories and the subsequent control of that volume.

-Copyright of the final edited volume arising from the project will be transferred to the Mrs. Barrette. However, any portions of the volume of an analytical nature produced by students or faculty working on the project may be reproduced or used by the individual(s) involved for scholarly publications, providing that guideline "8" is followed.

7) Guidelines governing the production, dissemination, and control of other community focussed material coming from the project.

Mrs. Barrette will define her role in any subsequent use of the material collected in the final volume for all subsequent community focussed work. Mrs.



Barrette will define the participation of the current UBCO research participants, and their roles.

ð) Guidelines governing the production, dissemination, and control of scholarly use of material coming out of the project

- The members of the research team from UBCO will have the right to use material produced by the project for future scholarly work providing that copies of this work is provided to Mrs. Barrette comment and/or correction. In the case of verbal presentations (ie Conference Papers) copies will be supplied as soon as possible before the presentation is given. In the case of published material Mrs. Barrette will have six months to comment prior to publication.

**Confidentiality*

- One of the most important elements of the project is the recognition that as an Elder, Mrs. Barrette owns her knowledge, and has given her approval to use this knowledge. Thus rather than confidentiality, the guidelines are constructed to ensure that she can control the flow and use of her knowledge (up to and including their withdrawal from participation).

- In addition, no researcher shall breach confidentiality except as directed by Mrs. Barrette for the benefit of the project, and in project directed activities.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail to RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.



CONSENT AND ETHICS FORM

Participant's Consent to Use Photography, Archival and Interview Material

Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: A Microhistory Ethics, Research Guidelines, and the Conditions for Research for the Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: A Microhistory

Tansi.

First, thanks very much for helping with the project. It's great you could participate. Now it's time to decide if you want us to use your contributions.

If you decide to let us use your contributions, we will include the material with the contributions from other people and some archival research and a research thesis. The thesis, and any subsequent research derived from the research will be written for the completion of a Masters degree at UBC Okanagan. Any archival materials collected will be housed with the Primary Investigator at UBC Okanagan: everyone who participates will be sent a copy of the interview tapes and transcripts before the thesis is actually submitted. We may also make a copy of some of the materials available through the Internet (we will send you the web address where you can see it). When everything is completed we will send a copy of the Thesis, and any subsequent research (academic articles etc that arise from the research).

So, the question is, will you let us use the interview, and archival materials we just collected? Remember, these will be publicly shown papers, so other people will see them and your part in them. They will see and hear what you said and did and know that you are the person talking and writing. So, do you want to give us your material? You choose. If you want everything back you can have it. We will give you all copies of everything. If you only want us to use some parts of the material but not others, we can do that too. This is purely voluntary – no one will get in trouble if you decide to quit now. We will also send you the copies of the material from your interview that we intend to use in the research. You can withdraw from the project anytime until the research is submitted or is publicly shown – but if you sign this form, you will need to contact us and

5

Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: Project – Consent to use materials – Ver 2, June 2009

Appendix IV: Follow-up letter: Consent to Use Photography, Archival and Interview Material

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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Participant's Consent to Use Photography, Archival and Interview Material. Follow up

Ethics, Research Guidelines, and the Conditions for Research for the Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: A Microhistory

Principal Investigator:

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Co Investigator

Erin Dolmage
Masters Student: Community Culture and Global Studies
Phone: 250-864-4474
Email: erin.dolmage@ubc.ca

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Tansi,

We would like to thank-you for volunteering to be part of this project. We believe that the information you have provided us with will be of great use to both your family and the community. What we intend to do with the written interviews as well as information from the diaries and to develop a research thesis out of it. You will receive a copy of this thesis, your interview and tapes. The original copies of the interviews and the tapes will be put into the University of British Columbia Okanagan's archives. If you agree to this, we need to have you sign your name at the bottom of this page. If you don't want to have your life history published or don't want to have the tapes of your life history placed in the university archives, please don't sign. Do what makes you feel comfortable and don't worry about the students, they won't fail if you don't want your history included in the thesis.

Meegwee.chi.

Mike and Erin

|

Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: Follow Up: Participant Consent to Use Photography, Archival and Interview Material- Ver 1, Apr 2029

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



1. I agree to have my oral history printed and placed in the thesis.
Yes No
2. I agree to have my personal journals photographed and transcribed by researchers at The University of British Columbia
Yes No
3. I agree to have the photographs of the journals, original copies and tapes of my interview stored in the University of British Columbia's archives.
Yes No

Name (Print)

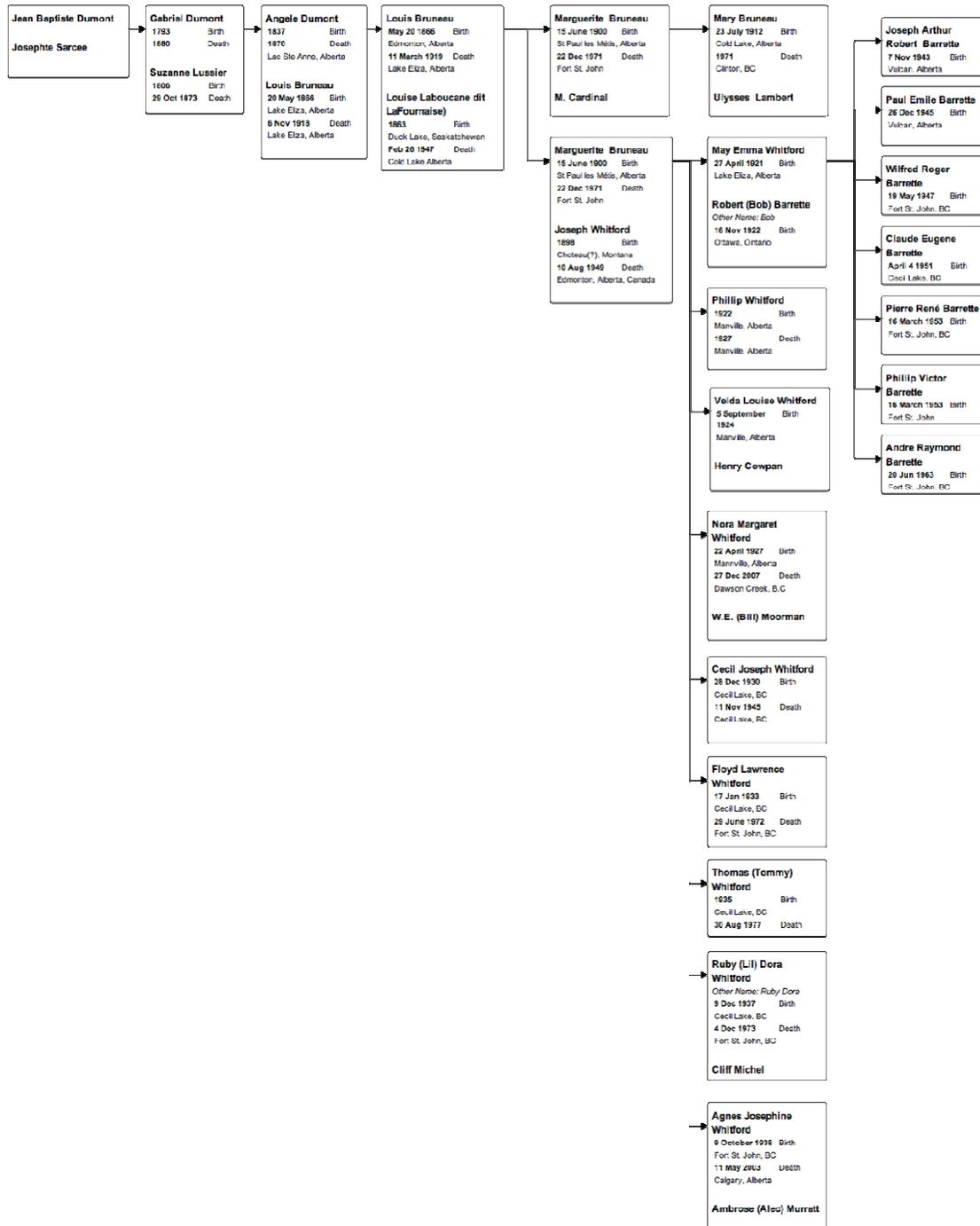
Signature

Date

2

Métis Diaries in Fort St. John and the Northern Peace: Follow Up: Participant Consent to Use Photography, Archival and Interview Material—Vol 1, Apr. 2020

Appendix V: May Barrette Family Tree



Certificate of Approval: UBC Research Ethics Board

<https://file:///C:/Users/ADMINI~1/Desktop/20090624...>



The University of British Columbia Okanagan
 Research Services
Behavioural Research Ethics Board
 3333 University Way
 Kelowna, BC V1Y 1V7

Phone: 250-807-9412
 Fax: 250-807-8438

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Michael J. Evans	INSTITUTION / DEPARTMENT: UBC/UBCO IKE Barber School of Arts & Sci/UBCO Admin Unit 1 Arts & Sci/UBCO Anthropology	UBC BREE NUMBER: H08-02924
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT:		
Institution		Site
N/A		N/A
Other locations where the research will be conducted: Subject's home, Private residence Fort St. John, BC., Northern Peace River District.		
CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Erin Dolmage		
SPONSORING AGENCIES: Metis Provincial Council of British Columbia Northern Scientific Training		
PROJECT TITLE: Ethics, Research Guidelines, and the Conditions for Research for the Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: A Microhistory.		
REB MEETING DATE: July 6, 2009	CERTIFICATE EXPIRY DATE: July 6, 2010	
DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:		DATE APPROVED: July 9, 2009
Document Name	Version	Date
Consent Forms:		
Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: Project – Consent to use materials	1	May 1, 2009
Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: Project – Consent to use materials	2	June 18, 2009
Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: Follow Up: Participant Consent to Use Photography, Archival and Interview Material	1	May 1, 2009
Letter of Initial Contact:		
Métis Diaries in Fort St John and the Northern Peace: Project – Introductory letter	1	May 1, 2009
Other Documents:		
Thesis Proposal: Microhistory: An "Exceptional-Normal" Biographical Approach to Métis Self Identification in Fort St. John	1	June 19, 2009
The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were		

found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board Okanagan and signed electronically by:

Dr. Daniel Salhani, Chair